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THE LONELINESS OF CHRIST

THE LONELINESS OF CHRIST

STUDIES IN THE DISCIPLINE OF LIFE

BY

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FOREWORD

JESUS hath now many lovers of His heavenly kingdom, but few bearers of His cross.

He findeth many companions of His table, but few of His abstinence.

All desire to rejoice with Him, few are willing to endure anything for or with Him.

Many follow JESUS unto the breaking of bread; but few to the drinking of the cup of His passion.

Many reverence His miracles, few follow the ignominy of His cross.

Many love JESUS so long as no adversities befall them.

Many praise and bless Him so long as they receive any consolation from Him.

But they who love JESUS for His own sake, and not for some special comfort, bless Him

FOREWORD

in all tribulation and anguish of heart, as well as in the state of highest comfort.

Yes, although He should never be willing to give them comfort, they notwithstanding would ever praise Him and wish to be always giving thanks."

S. THOMAS À KEMPIS.

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THE LONELINESS OF CHRIST

CHAPTER I

THE LONELY MAN

SOME few years ago a great many people went to see Mr. F. E. Benson's clever children's play, *The Piper*, and chiefly because in the theme of it there occurs one of the most moving of scenes which, surely, few who see forget. The Piper in Mr. Benson's creation is not a vindictive person as in the old German story, but rather a wayward strolling minstrel, sadly pathetic and lovable, who has the greatest passion for sympathy and love, and who steals away the hearts of the village children with his music because he loves them so. The children are very happy with him, but the tears of the parents who have suffered loss move him to restore all but one. This one has twined his little fingers very closely round the Piper's heart. He is a cripple boy; and he is quite content with the Piper, who makes more of him than any one did in the village, so that the Piper feels

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justified in refusing the mother's pleading for her boy, at the cross-roads, where she meets him. But he is not unmoved, and when she has gone sobbing down the road, he sits by the way and tries to assure himself that he is justified in his keeping of the cripple; only then, very beautifully and movingly, Another begins to ask what the mother has been denied. .

As the Piper sits, he looks up and sees the wayside crucifix of the cross-roads. Looking at it, its message reaches him. Presently he begins to speak, and there goes forward a one-sided dialogue.*

"Well," says the Piper, "If You did suffer, what of that? Why should I suffer because You did? I love him; he cheers me; no one loves him as I do. I *will* keep him."

"Why do You hang there so still? You seem to accuse me with Your stillness! Oh! I know Your disciples must take up the cross and follow You or they cannot be . . . cannot be . . . Yours. But leave me this little one, only this little one, this little crippled one! How I will love him, and how he will love me! Leave me this little one! . . ."

"I know his mother weeps, but all of us must weep, and why not she? She is his mother? Well, she has had the joy of his

* The words that follow are only in substance what the Piper says in the play.

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birth and she has husband and friends. But why should I alone have no wife or family, home or love? I will not let him go, this little crippled one! He is mine; I won him by my music, this little crippled one! I will not let him go. . . .”

He sits still, and the evening draws in, but he cannot remove his eyes from the crucifix. Then he gets up and stands beneath the cross. “Don’t! Don’t!” he cries. . . .

Then at last it comes, the surrender. He flings his arms out. “Ah!” he says, “You, too, were homeless, I know, I know. You, too, gave up all love, and for me. Oh! it is hard, it is hard, but You have won. He shall go, my little crippled boy. He shall go—Lonely Man.”

•The Lonely Man!—was there ever more tender title for our Lord? There is a ring about it that goes straight to the heart, and somehow it seems so exactly to fit Him Whose delights were with the sons of men, but who yet *looked for some to have pity, but there was no man, neither found He any to comfort Him.* Was there ever one among all His friends who thoroughly understood Him? Was there one of His companions who did not fail Him in the moment of His need? He was ever in the crowd—alone; in the house among His disciples—alone; among the curious and the hostile more than ever alone. A Peter

reaches the very heart of faith, and the Son of Man cries out that here at last is one upon whom He can build, can rest; and five minutes later he is as Satan to Him, and He alone in His endeavour once again. A John seems to pass into close intimacy; he is admitted to the wonder of the Mount of Transfiguration and schooled by the example of a little child; and then in a moment, despite the "set face" which might have taught him so many things, at the village of the Samaritans he knows not what spirit he is of, and Jesus is isolated again. Or even yet more strongly, what pathos attaches to that last wonderful ride into Jerusalem! For three years the Master has been explaining His mission; for months He has been perfectly plain about the Cross; but that day, as He rode up, waving spears would not have been a more complete illustration of misunderstanding than the waving palms, and even the Pharisees who scowled, hardly understood Him less than the crowd who cheered. Some would crown Him King, for Whom thorns were already grown; some would He should never reign over them, He for Whom the Cross was prepared; and not a soul around shared His heart's secret. Lonely, Lonely Man!

The field for meditation on the loneliness of our Lord is a very great one, and it grows

larger the more one thinks and prays. So many reasons contribute to His loneliness. There is sin, of course, and betrayal; there is misunderstanding, and eagerness that blunders and hurts because it is so true and yet so blind; and even more, there is the great Dereliction of Calvary. A king is lonely on his throne, and JESUS was a King. A missionary is lonely far away among savage people, and JESUS was a missionary. A man of genius is lonely because his thoughts are above those of ordinary men and he has no one to share them completely with him, and of JESUS it was said that no man ever spoke (or thought therefore) as He spoke. And God is lonely, not when God is God (and the Christian mystery of the Trinity is exactly the mystery of love in the Godhead), but lonely when He takes our flesh and tabernacles amongst men.

It may be urged, however, that it is not quite true to speak so of our Blessed Lord since He Himself said more than once that He was not alone because His Father was with Him. This is, of course, strictly true. Our Lord as Son of God enjoyed a communion with the Father, so intimate and holy that surely it is one of those mysteries into which the very angels scarcely dare to probe. Never did Son look into the face of Father, as JESUS looked, under that blue vault of

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eastern sky, into the face of God. There was never such confidence as His swift yet so confident, *Father, I will . . .*; never resigned trust like His *Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit*. Always, as He moves about the villages and lanes of Galilee in the Gospel story, we have this sense of His divine companionship with God borne in upon us. "*The works which the Father hath sent Me to accomplish . . . I do*"; "*This commandment received I from My Father*"; "*My sheep shall never perish . . . no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's Hand*"; "*I am not alone*"; "*The Father is in Me, and I in the Father*"; "*I and My Father are One*"; He says. There seems little room for loneliness here.

Yet there is another side. It is the wonder of our Blessed Lord that He is completely human though so entirely God; and it is not so much that He had a vision of God in life denied to us, as that where He had companionship, we fail to find it. Speaking quite reverently, we might have stood by His side while He was wrapt in communion with the Father and have heard no voice and seen no sign. Why? Because, far more often than not, there was no objective voice to hear nor sign to see; because, surely, except for a few instances marked off by special and unique occurrences, the communion which our Lord had with His Father was such as we might

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have if we had not had sin. It was not in the enjoyment of outward manifestations so much as in the power of inward realization, that He differed so from us. The Garden of Gethsemane, for example, lifts the curtain for us upon our Lord's times of prayer. It helps us to picture Him in the mountain tops of Galilee by night. He will be kneeling on the hard stone; the wind will be all about Him on the open moor; the clouds will drive across the moon in swift and utter silence as they ever do; the wild things of the hillside will be undisturbed by any approach; but Jesus talks with God.

This gave Him, then, the real experience of human loneliness. Without any prejudice to the freedom of His soul's intercourse with God, Jesus experienced that human loneliness which is so real to us. As man He went lonely among men. When His human spirit craved for human companionship, He never found it completely, He often did not find it at all. When He lifted His soul up to God, He passed the threshold of that other world because of His holiness and truth, but He passed it in spirit and He walked by faith, and it is hard to believe that He did not sometimes long for something tangible, for something more. Surely half the bitterness of the cup when He came to drink it was this, that He had to drink as one who trusts

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for the far end but does not yet clearly see each step. So it is comfort even to the mystic, who comes near to that "which to the soul is sight," but who knows what it is sometimes to find the Heavens brass and the doors of the Sanctuary closed, not because God is absent, but because it is His will to be hid, that the Sacred Heart of JESUS knew of that suffering too. This is God's way in *bringing many sons unto glory*, and He made the *Author of their salvation perfect also thus*. So, too, the wife who, with all her faith in the Fatherhood of God, cries out at the news of the loneliness an enemy bullet has sent her, may find an echo to her cry in the heart of our Lord; and so the mother whose eyes are never the same when her boy is gone, the man whose friend is more to him than a woman can understand. JESUS *hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows*; He did not shrink from this also. He was the Lonely Man.

Now this real human experience of our Lord makes the appeal that it does to us because a certain loneliness is the share of every human being, and the lonely days are the bitterest of all that we have to live. It is the share of every man because every soul lives apart from others more really than we care often to admit. The isolation of the soul is one of those terrible truths that we hardly dare look clearly in the face because of the

terror of the reality of them. Of course there is the loneliness of the hour of death and of the day of judgment, and although our dear Lord's loneliness at that hour too is to be the greatest help to us, still it is not of that that we speak now. Rather it is of that terrible isolation which the most modern of all modern sciences helps us to visualize as never before.

The author of a recent book on Mysticism pictures each soul as shut up, as it were, in an iron box. Our senses are so many telephone and telegraph wires connecting us with the outside world, and our organs of sight are like some periscope above the water. But far down below all these lies the secret thing we call the soul. It finds the wire system as utterly inadequate for expression sometimes as a man who should have to tell his love by telephone, or the fluent speaker who should be limited to writing. The connections, too, are often interrupted. The eyes of a dumb beast are pathetic in their eagerness to speak; how much more when sometimes a dumb soul looks out at you from the eyes of a man!

Some share in the sense of this loneliness comes to us all sooner or later. We try to convince ourselves that it does not exist, like a lover who believes, in the arms of his love, that she completely understands, or a woman who thinks that marriage will give her the

complete sympathy of some other soul. Love does much, but love cannot do all. As S. Thomas à Kempis puts it: "Some time or other thou must be separated from all, whether thou wilt or no." You may banish the day on which you will know that no one understands you; but it will come at last. You may try to put off the time when you feel you must do this or that, and when you will explain your actions to all your friends, and when they will all say "Yes," and when they will all mean "No"; but it will come. It is the dark night of the soul in its companionship with man. S. Augustine was right, and God has made us, not for one another, but for Himself, and He is never satisfied until we have proved that there is no ultimate rest except in Him. Like Francis Thompson in "The Hound of Heaven," we flee Him down the nights and down the days. We try to make sanctuaries in friends and occupations and thoughts, but it is all of no use ultimately. Any sanctuary we can make is too small for the soul. The moment of its lonely nakedness is bound to come; and only he who has made a study of the loneliness in the human life of Jesus Christ will hear the voice that says—

"Ah fondest, blindest, weakest,
I am He whom thou seekest!
Thou dravest love from thee, who dravest Me."

Such words as these lead us easily to that other and truer "dark night of the soul." This is the dark night that lies in some measure before every soul before it can attain to that real communion with God which it at heart desires. Our souls have to be disciplined and schooled; we have to learn to go on loving through misunderstanding, to go on struggling through pain, to go on hoping through discouragement. More than all we have to learn to go on trusting though no ray of light pierce our gloom. It is the last great test—the test of Calvary to our Lord: will the soul continue faithful though God hide Himself?

To approach a subject like this is to cross the threshold into a mysterious room. May be that dark night, that final test, is not for every man, but it is much more likely that it is. True, many men seem to live without the consciousness of one day spent in the desert; but then so many of us do not thirst after God *as the hart thirsteth after the water-brooks*, though we sing that we do. But we may be sure of this, that before the soul can know the true, and find the satisfaction of the Water of Life, it must so thirst. Perhaps that thirsting is reserved for many till they pass beyond the Veil; then, as the light dawns richer and fuller, they will look, and looking, long. "Let light perpetual shine

upon them" we pray. On the other hand, there may be some whose power to thirst is ultimately lost, and the awfulness of the deeps in our Lord's words must be for them. But for others, there is *the longing after God*; the desire to be like Him; *the soul athirst for the living God*. Of such stuff the saints were made, and it is they who teach us what to expect.

One of the great mystics, Suso, puts it in this way. He says the Eternal Wisdom came to him and said: "Thou hast been a child at the breast, a spoilt child; now I will withdraw all this"; and with that Suso passed into what another, Rulman Merswin, called with beautiful language, "The School of Suffering Love." As Miss Evelyn Underhill has pointed out, we see the whole value for life of the Dark Night in that saying, for it means that our Lord is taking the soul one step further into "an education in selfless constancy." One of the happiest of saints gives us the key to this. "Lord," she says, "since Thou hast taken from me all that I had of Thee, yet of Thy grace leave me the gift which every dog has by nature, that of being true to Thee in my distress."

Two things seem to bring this about. First, very often outside circumstances conspire to turn the soul back on God, as when the great Suso was practically overwhelmed and nearly

driven from the religious life by a scandal falsely set up against him. Secondly, God gives, as we go on in knowledge of Him, some sort of vision to the soul, so that it comes to see a little of the true meaning of the purity of God. This purity makes the soul see her own imperfections as if they were enormous sins, and the distance between creature and Creator as infinite. Then, as S. Theresa says, the soul that is true will only thirst more violently for the love and likeness of God, "for there is nothing in this world which can soothe the violence of that thirst; and besides, the soul would not consent to quench it with any other water than that of which our Lord spoke to the Samaritan woman."

• All this may seem beyond the religious experience of most of us, and so it probably is. But we can share in it to a degree; indeed we must if we would really attain to that consciousness of the friendship of God which is essential to real religion. And if we are to do so, there is a loneliness to be experienced. Friends must be left behind; comforts based on all external things must be reckoned as nothing. *Whosoever doth not take up the cross and follow Me, cannot be My disciple.* We have got to rise up and go out to meet the Bridegroom when the cry of His coming is heard in the streets. We shall

have to leave familiar things behind. As a wonderful verse in the mystical "Song of Songs" puts it: *When I had a little passed by them, then found I Him whom my soul loveth.*

So there it is. The road of life which stretches ahead for all of us is bound to have miles like those on some great Scotch moor when the mists settle down and the traveller is far from home, or such as others across some East Anglian fen where there is no change in the dreary waste, and no sun in the vast of the sky. Friends will fall away; lovers will die; hopes will fail; how Europe knows it in these bitter days! And even more, that little bit of the divine in the secret chamber of our hearts is going to know the time when it will long for a vision too high to see, or crave to know *a love that passeth knowledge.* Silent hours have to be spent by the fire at night when the day is done and the world shut out and our insatiable longings shut fast in. Grim days have to be faced when the toil of life seems utterly barren, and the thousands of the streets more uncomprehending than the stones of the road. Prayers have yet to be prayed, please God, that shall lift no portion of the cloud that hangs on our spirits, but in their very failure put the cup of final victory to our lips.

He is wise who prepares for the battle before it is joined, as he knows most of triumph who seeks most of conflict. In these little studies we shall essay both these things, and we will turn for help and guidance to the Man of all men loneliest.

CHAPTER II

THE LONELINESS OF MISUNDERSTANDING

No artist has ever yet succeeded in painting successfully that one vivid scene upon which the curtain lifts that otherwise hides so completely the mystery of our Lord's Childhood. There have been attempts, but either Jesus is portrayed as a boy so much in advance of boyhood that the human nature scarcely seems to be there at all, or else it is the Mother and the losing and the finding that strikes the dominant note. Perhaps it is easier to paint with words, the more so as in this way the details which can never be supplied can be left the more easily to the spirit of devotion. We see Him, then, a peasant boy Who has joined the little group of those who cluster round the rabbis in the pillared porticos of the Temple, and Who is taking a part in that system of questioning and answering which played so great a part in education until printing gave scholars their books. But there had been no such pupil before, just as later there was to be no such

teacher again. He has been at work for several days now, and more than one old master has joined the group, excited by the beauty of this boy's imagination and desire. Doubtless there were some among them to whom the awakening of intelligence in a pupil seemed always the wonderful thing that it is, men who rejoiced in that perpetual wonder of another understanding being quickened and quickening itself; but in the eager questions of this boy they marvelled at a spirit more eager than that in any who had sat to be taught by them before. And surely we may fancy there were others, crabbed and hard old men, who found themselves stirred by forgotten hopes as His young voice begged for a knowledge which they themselves had once longed to possess. The real desire to know is always like a keen rapier darting hither and thither in the sun, and may be His desire awoke strange memories in minds that had grown dull, while even so early as this, His words served to *discern the thoughts and intents of the heart*.

Then came the interruption. His family had missed Him, and the Mother instantly had thought of the score of little troubles that He might be in. She came upon Him there, her own Son among those strange old men, with a mind full of fears as to where He might have slept or what He might have

eaten, and fifty other little details besides. That is the sorrow of every mother, born of every mother's love and care, and it leaped instantly to her lips. *Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing.* The eager Child turned to see her. That young mind that had been glowing with the noble legends of His people, that had been learning the swift joy of opening doors and of peering into hidden rooms, that had been soaring in imagination God knows where, that had been answering with a new-found power and all the strange delight of instructive knowledge, that mind was recalled in a moment to the carpenter's shop and the village life. He must go back to the things that seemed important to Joseph and His Mother; how the weary weeks stretched ahead in that moment! Even in the second of recall, the keen young mind flashed higher. *Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?* He asked. "Don't you understand that I belong to another order of things from that of the home and the bench?"

I think that in the very moment of His question, He learned even more than He had learned through the three days that were past. *His Father's Business?*—well, and where was it to be done? Surely in the days of silence that followed; surely in the scant narrative *He went down to Nazareth and was*

subject unto them, the key is given to us. His Father's business was that for eighteen years He should learn obedience; that for eighteen years He should gather sticks for the fire, and grow horny-handed in the use of hammer and axe, and talk of family affairs by the fire-light in the evening, and leave the wise old men and enchanted books of Jerusalem. For eighteen years! No, of course He did not see them all just then, but He saw a few with the eyes of a boy and they looked as long as twice eighteen. The wonder of the story is not that His people wist or wist not His Father's business better than before, but that He wist, and that He went to do it. And as for the old men, they shook themselves mentally and went back to the other boys. Just one or two perhaps, who still retained an old enthusiasm, allowed themselves to dream a little of the eager lad and of what He might have done if He had stayed with them; but the rest, most likely, fumbling with their old traditions forgot that He had even been there at all. His Mother went deepest in the long run. She *kept all these things and pondered them in her heart*. And since there is no heart for pondering like a mother's, and no Mother for attempting it like Mary, she saw deeply in the end. That is why we read the story to-day in the pages of S. Luke.

So, then, the first moment of acute loneliness in the life of our Lord stands revealed for us. Many are to follow, but perhaps none will ever quite eclipse this in its beauty and pathos. Look once more at the lad of twelve, as He stands there in the dark shade of the pillars outlined against the bright sun beyond. His Mother's voice has brought the talk of the class and its teachers to a pause for a moment. It is one of those moments in which things seem to stand still for a second or two. The rabbis are looking at Him; Mary and Joseph look at Him; but there is not one who really shares the tempest of His feeling. The other lads about Him are probably interested not at all. Mary and Joseph, despite the place their relationship to Him is one day going to give them in the Courts of Heaven, are at the moment entirely uncomprehending too. Yes, and even we, as we look with all our after-knowledge, cannot share fully in our Lord's mind at that moment. What dawning sense of mission had already come to Him, what suspicion of His true place in the world it was to be His to save? What far-stretching avenue of the years did those boyish eyes look down that day, or what said the voice that had undoubtedly been sounding in the house of His soul ever since He had been brought up to Jerusalem? Of course we do not know, and

we are never likely to do so. But it ought to be possible for us all to have some sympathy for the sense of loneliness that was His that day, and to learn at least one lesson of the way in which God speaks.

Right in the forefront we see this: that every forward step is always taken by the soul alone. It seems, at first, not a little strange that this should be, but in reality there is nothing strange about it. We learn not so much by being taught, as by the moments in which we make our own the things we have heard. Each of those moments is like a conquest to the person who experiences it. That is why learning is the great adventure. Even in secular things the intelligent child bears on his face the stamp exactly of an explorer or of a conqueror, for each step advanced in knowledge carries with it the sense of a land but just visited, a mystery but just explained. For a long while indeed the knowledge that we share our knowledge takes away the sense that we have gained it alone, but later on that sense deepens and deepens, until the learner is in very truth alone because ahead of the advance that now but follows him.

Now what is true of secular knowledge is much more acutely true of spiritual. Each spiritual truth, if it is to be known at all, must be known, not merely, as we say, "with

the head," but very definitely with the heart; and as one by one such truths are understood, the soul has all the experience of adventuring alone. This understanding with the heart is no easy thing, and hence it is that few set out upon the adventure, and fewer still continue with it. The quest of all spiritual knowledge was outlined again and again by our Lord when He said, for example, *This kind cometh not out but by prayer and fasting*, or *Strive to enter in at the strait gate, for strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth into life, and few there be that find it*. Always the method is the same: first, the intellectual effort to go as far as may be with the understanding, and then the meditation and the prayer which carry the lagging feet of the soul into the hidden wonders of the Father's House. The moment of initiation may be long to seek. Faith, which is the soul's real sight, is the gift of God, and no one ever knows exactly when He may be pleased to give. But when that moment comes, we seem to see a great light. We say not so much "I know!" as "I see!" and it is always the lonely "I" that says it.

Very plainly, therefore, such experience as was our Lord's in the temple court that day is bound to come sooner or later, in some degree or other, to every sincere child of the Father who would really hear His Voice.

The sense of taking steps forward alone becomes very soon more than a mere sense. It becomes the reality in a deeper and a truer way. We have each about us a very small circle, and every member of that circle looks out at things at a slightly different angle from that of every other, and makes progress in a direction which is not exactly that of any of his friends. The home circle almost invariably presents such an experience even more acutely than any other, for we construct our other circles out of people who attract us by being in some sense like, whereas the home circle has been constructed for us, and so it comes about that the individual soon finds himself taking steps out of the path that those around him have grown used to following. This or that sense of what ought to be, or of what is right, is not shared by father or mother, by brother or sister, by friend or lover. We come to feel that we have a great secret, not that we would not, but that we cannot share. That secret becomes at length a kind of burden sometimes almost too heavy to bear. It may come in childhood or in manhood, in a few things or in many, for a long period or only now and again. Whenever and however it comes, it brings the loneliness of misunderstanding, and with it, as with every other experience in life, a chance to profit or a

chance to lose. It is big enough at times to soar a whole life, or, on the contrary, to transform it into a loving tenderness more truly Christlike, perhaps, than anything else; it is small enough, at others, just to make the sore that irritates more than we care to admit, or, on the contrary again, to give a little power of understanding that we cannot do without. In any case, therefore, we may well turn to the Divine Example of the Lonely Man.

First, however, just notice how many illustrations of such loneliness there are. One of the most striking of the loneliness of a child is given us in "Father and Son," where the boy, his little soul a perfect tempest of hopes and fears, is as nearly shipwrecked as a soul can be. He is trying hard, for example, to find out about God, to get the vision glorious that it is life to strive to see, and he tells how he prayed from his open window over the sea for a sign from God. It never came; the boy has no confidant to whom he can explain all that he has learnt of disappointments, of longing and of pain; he goes out upon a lonely path with no light on the dark sea, nor star.

Great religious leaders as far apart as Mohammed and Ignatius Loyola have all travelled the same way. The Arabian prophet is a strange and foreign figure to

us all, and one that we associate so much with later mistakes and blemishes that we think little of the earlier days. But he is a moving figure out there on the rocky hillslopes above Mecca, the waste of the desert before him, the vast of the sky above, as he wrestles to know more of God. And then the knowledge comes; in the great words of the Koran:

“In the name of the merciful and compassionate God.

“Say: ‘He is God alone!

God the Eternal!

Nor is there like unto Him any at all!’”

But who knows or cares? His soul has stepped forward alone. He is thought a madman, a mystic, a dreamer, and indeed he is alone *because* he has dreamed. It is the price, and it has to be paid.

Ignatius came to his knowledge, and to the burden of his loneliness, at Manresa, but he bore it for years among bishops’ palaces and in the courts of the Universities of France and Spain. He had the idea; the sense of mission; the vision of what might be; but he paid the price of the loneliness of misunderstanding.

Every poet pays that price, of course, but of recent years none has paid it as Francis Thompson did. That little box of unopened

letters and broken useless things which was all he left when he came to die, tells its own bitter tale. His verse tells it even plainer. He was alone with his soul on the downs of Storrington or on the pavements of the Embankment. It was just that loneliness that won him power. It is the price of vision, the knowledge of the soul, and it has to be paid.

The great lesson we have to learn then, is that it is God Who is waiting to speak when the soul is left alone. All knowledge is from Him; and understanding, or even merely the desire to understand, is the dawning of a little more of the knowledge of God Himself. It is just that which makes for loneliness. It makes for loneliness because in the moment of its coming it fills all our horizon as God must always do when He is seen, and because the knowledge of God is a particular personal thing which is not to be shared wholly or at once. A wonderful truth underlies the Old Testament saying: *I am a jealous God.*

So in the moment when it comes to us all, the moment of this strange sense of seeing what others do not see and of being alone in our Vision, let us try at least to realize that God is there. Let us try to turn our eyes back to the temple court where Jesus realized for the first time that no one really understood the light that was dawning upon Him, but

where, exactly because of this, His Father's Business and His Father's House seemed clearer and dearer than ever before. It may be, indeed, that it is a hard price which has to be paid; but it is the price of companionship with God.

That lonely lad of twelve teaches us, moreover, what we must do when the vision is given to us, and I think His teaching at that hour resolves itself into three things.

First, our sense of personal possession ought not to make us disobedient to the call of everyday duties around. Obey the plain circumstances of life. The light that had dawned upon JESUS was precisely that He was not destined for the carpenter's shop, and yet He went straight back to it! And why? Surely because, unlike ourselves in such a case, He did not confuse the light that had come with the light that was to come. The fact that He realized more lay ahead than Nazareth was no reason why He should not go back home that day. He had been told what He was not to be, but not what He was to be. He had been inspired, if you like, with the sense of a kinship that must mean ere long a marvellous vocation, but it was a burden that had been given Him to bear, not a call as yet to a revolt for which He was not fit. And *He went down to Nazareth to be subject still.*

, But, secondly, He went with the hope, in His heart. I suppose our Blessed Lord never for a moment turned His back on the vision He had received that day. That He was to go back to a life of real misunderstanding for a while was only an incentive to Him to cling the closer to the knowledge He possessed, only a discipline which should make Him very tender towards Joseph and Mary and school Him to grow *in favour with God and man*. That hope was His stock-in-trade. There would be overwhelming days on which He would almost doubt that He had part or lot in His Father's Business or His Father's House, but the very sense that had been His of genuine isolation would be the rock beneath His feet: They wist not, but He knew. He had been called! The light had shined! Never would He give up that till it shined *more and more to the perfect day*.

That, thirdly, then, bred His absolute trust in the love and wisdom of the Father. He would not doubt that He Who had begun would perfect, and that He would never prove unfaithful to Himself. Why, that moment of human misunderstanding marked in a real sense the beginning of the divine understanding that was to be set up, and that was to develop so wonderfully, between Himself and His Father. The Father and He shared a secret together. That He shared it at all

marked the Father's love; that He was content to share it, little or big, marked His Own trust.

And so the long miles between Jerusalem and Nazareth took on a newer aspect. The coming there had been a great adventure to the lad of twelve, every hill a land of promise, every valley, bright with flowers and lit by the sun, a magic casement for His imagination to see beneath and through. But His eyes were even brighter now. Maybe He was more silent; but behind Him lay His Father's House, and He was about His Father's Business.

CHAPTER III

THE LONELINESS OF PRAYER

Lord, teach us to pray was surely the most natural of all the expressions which the disciples addressed to our Lord throughout the course of their experience with Him. Looking back at that wonderful life of the Son of Man, Who was also Son of God, it is natural enough to feel that of all the human activities that were His the most arresting must have been that of His prayers. There is evidence enough that He prayed with unique power—the only son of the widow of Nain and the brother of Mary and Martha witness to that; and there is evidence that He prayed with divine forethought and understanding, as the prayer for the conversion of S. Peter, and that for the unity of His disciples as a sign to the world, make clear; but we feel somehow that we want to look deeper and to probe further into the mystery of Jesus on His knees. We are, indeed, shown much. Gethsemane alone is a study in the art of prayer, inexhaustible in its

death and beauty. But when we do try to lift the veil on the more ordinary of our Lord's prayers, we stumble always on the threshold over an unsurmountable obstacle. For Jesus habitually prayed alone. His attitude, His method, His expressions, the joy that He experienced, the desire—ah! how we would know them! If our Master, we are tempted to say sometimes, had only left us Spiritual Exercises, how we would follow them! and that He has not, points to some mystery behind it all, a mystery in S. Paul's use of that word, a revelation, that is, into which we see *as in a glass darkly*, but still see a little of the golden wonder hidden there.

S. Luke appears to have been more moved by our Lord's habits of prayer than any of the other evangelists. A golden thread runs through his Gospel composed of the occasions upon which he noted that the Master had fallen to prayer. Doubtless he does not give us a complete list; indeed, we must suppose that our Lord had the Jewish habits of daily and synagogue prayer which were, in a sense, too familiar to the evangelists for them to set them down. But as the story unfolds, S. Luke directs us again and again, as it were, to notice how Jesus prays. Let us glance at a few of the occasions.

Right in the beginning there is a series of

incidents all to themselves. The Baptism is over, and instantly our Lord separates Himself, driven by the Spirit into the wild hill-country of tangled herb and ragged rock, where, under the hot passage of the sun by day, or searched by the windy silence by night, His spirit learns to master both Himself and whatever else there be to tempt Him. He has forty days for prayer, and *He was with the wild beasts*. From such loneliness He steps out to activity. He is glorified of all. He preaches the acceptable year of the Lord. His word is with power over men and devils and disease. *And He departed and went into a desert place* (iv. 42).

Well, the people follow Him. He admits that He must preach, and the round begins again. By Gennesaret He gathers the leader of the later Apostolic band, and with him two, to be partners henceforward in a bigger fishing. With these in His company, He does the greatest yet of all His deeds of healing, and a leper is cleansed, so that *the fame of Him went the more abroad, and great multitudes came together to hear*. And—well, and what will He do? *And He withdrew Himself into the wilderness and prayed* (v. 16).

This withdrawal into solitude seems to initiate pronouncements of so definite a character that the evangelist has more to say of them than merely as before, that *He*

preached the Kingdom of God. Before the sick of the palsy He made His first startling declaration that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins, and in Levi's house He outlines the character of His Mission: I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. In a little He is dealing with the questions of Fasting, of Revelation, and of the Sabbath, and from point to point the anger of the traditional keepers of the national conscience rises. At that so simple but so devastating: Is it lawful on the Sabbath days to do good or to do evil? the demand, that is, that the view point shall be changed from theory to practice, from the study to the street—they were filled with madness, and commenced one with another what they might do to Jesus. And what does He do? We should expect it now. He must be lonely again. And it came to pass in those days that He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God (vi. 12).

So the record goes on, and it is too long to follow in detail, but as the weeks draw in to the last great week of all, the keen historian has slipped in a verse to teach us what has become the habitual practice of the Master. By this time His every appearance is the signal for a crowd to gather, and Sadducees, Scribes, Lawyers, Pharisees, and even His own disciples, fill the intervals of a long day

with criticism or query. It is a time when visions of the end are very plain to Him. There has been the manifestation of the "set face" *"going up to Jerusalem, and those wonderful eyes, like latent flames of fire (for they were seen blazing out in the Apocalypse) were looking far ahead to the signs in the sun, and on the earth perplexity and men's hearts failing them for fear.* And just then S. Luke gives us the key verse again: *And at night He went out and abode in the mount that is called the Mount of Olives.* We know what was His custom there. His disciples used to follow Him, but *He was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down and prayed.*

We see plainly enough, then, that the poor Piper was right at least about his Saviour at prayer, for there, if anywhere, JESUS was the Lonely Man. So far as we know, He Himself never explained the reason why it was so necessary to be alone to pray, but we ought never to forget that the great secret of the Christian Church is that the teaching and guidance of JESUS have never come to an end. It was expedient for us that He went away in the flesh with so little told, for that going made it possible for Him to say: *Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.* He relinquished the body that He had taken of Mary in order to inhabit that

new Body of His which, as S. Paul says again, and again, is the Church. In that Body *we have the mind of Christ.* In it, the disciples came to realize that they were being enabled by *the Spirit of Jesus*; and we have to guide us in such a subject as prayer, not merely the example of the Thirty Years, but the Presence that has been with us these Nineteen Centuries illuminating the actions of those early days.

First, then, Jesus used to go alone to pray because of what prayer is. Prayer to those who have not been to school with the disciples at the feet of Jesus may be "asking for things," but primarily it is not that at all. Prayer to some of us who make over much use of manuals and prayer-books may seem to be an exercise with orderly divisions into confession, adoration, petition, intercession and the like; but although that is better, still this is not prayer. Prayer is a state of the soul. To pray is to get into tune with the infinite, to transcend the temporalities of space and time, to *live in the spirit*. That is why *men ought always to pray*, because they ought always to live in the consciousness of God, because *ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God*.

Difficult as all this may sound, it is very far from being a peculiar or impossible thing. The chief reason why so few of us know how

to pray is that we do not want to know, just as the great majority of Christians are not saints precisely because they do not want to be. That we do not want to be, is sin in its simplest and most "original" form—one of the plainest and simplest facts of life. You and I prefer things of the body rather than of the soul—to eat, to drink, to sleep, to love, to work amongst men, and to see our labour under the sun. We prefer these rather than to experience heaven on earth, to learn of God, to thirst after Him, to see His will done and His Kingdom come. Not that those things of the body are in themselves wrong; for they are not; Jesus did them. But He did them for the end that they served, glad always when they were done, glad when the shadows fell and it drew near to the time when He could escape to the Garden or the Mountain Top, very glad when the iron gates of man's life on earth lift up their heads at last, and He who had learned to be King of the glory of the soul, could go in.

To pray, then, is to open up communication with our true and only real home *in the heavens*. He prays most who most realizes that he is but a stranger and a pilgrim, and that he seeks *a better country, that is a heavenly*. It is hard to realize that truth, because with us, in this dispensation of life, the real things appear to be the things around and about us,

the things we touch and handle, and that seem to make or mar our lives. But these are not the real things. Reality lies far below the outward and visible, as the still glories of a tropical paradise lie beneath the glare and heat of the Red Sea. To reach it, the spirit has to be set free. The body has to be forgotten, set aside, subdued, disciplined, so that then the soul, like some prisoner who has almost forgotten the light of the sun, can come out for a while and enjoy communion with God. The powers of communication are all there. The soul was made to pray. But too often the powers are almost atrophied, and the thorns and weeds of the great curse have grown up over the door upon which the ear may hear if it listens the steady knocking of Him Who stands without, the Source and the Bearer of Light.

How different all this is from the mere "asking for things" is plain enough. I once heard a preacher, whose name I have forgotten, use an excellent illustration. "For two purposes," he said, "men on board ship may be seen tugging at the anchor ropes. The one is that they may pull the anchor on board and be free; the other is that they may draw their boat up to the security of the tight-held anchor and be safe." It is the latter that is prayer. Prayer is the drawing of oneself closer and closer in to

God. Prayer is the hope set before us of ultimate union with Him; *which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast.*

Secondly, therefore, Jesus was plainly alone in prayer because, seeing what prayer is, one must clearly be alone to pray. Those wonderful nights of His are in a sense closed to us, but by what long processes did Jesus learn to pray! First, no doubt, there had to be the cooling of all the fevered moments of the days, the time during which each moment of the perpetual conflict of His life was weighed and tested and left in the keeping of His Father. There would be no abandonment of the past as if it had ceased to count; much rather a steady review that deepened His mind for the future as it drew ever more sharply towards the end. No wonder He *knew what was in men*, and even read their thoughts. The secret nights alone might well account for that. Men are simple enough, in the light of the Spirit. But that would not be all. There would be the ever steadier, sightless gaze into the eyes of the Father, while the things of earth slipped into their right place, and He felt neither the cold breeze from the snows of the north, nor the sharp stones half hidden in the grey dark upon which He knelt, nor the utter physical weariness of the day that was past. And then?—Ah! that is more than any man can

say. He who was caught up into the third heaven but once, thought it unlawful to say what he had seen and heard, and we cannot doubt that Jesus was often in that heaven.* He had sight of faith and hope and love, no mere promise of them. He came to know, ten thousand times more intimately of course, but still perhaps after the manner that some of His "friends" have since come to know, that God was love, a God of the living and not of the dead, a Spirit, and that *they who worship Him, must worship Him in spirit and in truth.* Yes, and still more—infinite mystery! He came to know that *I and My Father are one*, that He would give His flesh for the life of the world, that He could lay down His life, but only to take it again. Then, in the light of that knowledge and of that vision, intercessions took their place, intercessions for those given Him, and not for those only, but *for all who should believe through their word.* So JESUS prayed—alone.

Our Lord comes before us again, then, in this also as Master and Guide; and He teaches the elemental lesson that he who would pray must learn to be alone. That is the one lesson of prayer that we find so hard to master. Particularly in these days, when life has grown so full and interests so many,

* 1 Cor. xii.

when we seem to have caught a fever of desire for mass movements and great conferences and big intercessions, and when even those who would, find it hard to escape the whirl into which we are dragged, often against our will, we ought at least to attempt the secret of our Lord's calm power. He teaches us how to make a solitude of the heart in the busy rush of men, and of that we will see more in a little. We must, of course, recognize the need of common prayer, but that has its own place and must not push the other out, and that, too, is useless unless there is a certain detachment of the soul. Perhaps common prayer is better described as the attachment of the many to God at one time in one place—each separate from the other except where all meet in God. But for the present, the great lesson is that in solitude lies our best hope of breaking through to that serene atmosphere where the will of the Eternal Father beats *without shadow of turning*, and where the one true joy is to be found, and found in submission.

We ought, therefore, to make time to be alone praying. This is why the church is open, where everything is meant to help us to reach that other world that lies so close and yet so far; and when we are there, we should aim first, above all things, at passing into the state of union and quiet before ever

we formulate a thing. Not that that passing is a passive thing: that was the error of Quietism. It is the violent who take the Kingdom of Heaven by force. The clamour of earth must be beaten down. One by one the distracting things must be mastered and put under. One by one the senses must be brought into submission till the spirit is free. Every power God has given must be brought into play—concentration, imagination, sympathy, devotion, receptivity. And then, in this lonely silence, we find the “many-splendoured thing.”

It would seem that the Holy Spirit has steadily worked in and through the Church to teach us that the time of the offering of the Eucharist is more than all else the time for this. The children's bread is seen there, as the simple and daily provision for this need of the soul. The Sacrament is itself, if one may so say, a concession to our weakness, for in it there is that combination of outward and inward which makes our task the easier. We can see and handle of the Word of Life. God comes to meet us half-way. All else must slip out of sight, all except That Which is broken and offered and shown and given, *the Lamb of God Who taketh away the sins of the world.*

For this reason we miss the whole meaning of the Holy Communion if we place it

along with the other services of the Church. Either it is not a "service of the Church," or else it is *the* Service. It is not comparable to either Morning or Evening Prayer, or any other Devotion, helpful as these may be. In these we want to hear; in this we want to see. In these it matters a great deal that the priest should be educated, informed; in this it only matters that he should know and do his duty. In these we are school-mastered into religion—taught what to say and when to say it; in this the soul is brought to its Maker, and its Maker is brought to it, and they are left alone, face to face. These are as the Sermon on the Mount and the Synagogue; this as the Offering of the one Sacrifice and Calvary. Nothing disturbed the silence of those hours but the occasional cries of the great Priest as the offering of the Sacrifice proceeded, and yet did ever any of all those who gathered at the foot of the Cross experience "service" such as this? Ah yes, they did! They did, when, in after years, day by day or year by year, by the river where prayer was wont to be made, or in the catacomb where the silence and the darkness were disturbed by little else, whenever the perpetual Offering came once again into the circle of earth, and they cried, *Behold the Lamb!* once more. But that experience was reserved for times as these. We, too,

can enter that holy silence, and find it more eloquent in the language of the soul than the best that man can devise. We, too, in the dark of Calvary can find the Light of the World. We, too, if we will, although the business of the days press all about us and although there is toil and dust and sin, while that Holy Sacrifice is being offered, can still the voices that disturb, by the calm of His Presence, and be found, like JESUS, praying alone.

CHAPTER IV

THE LONELINESS OF THE CROWD

THERE is one incident in the Gospel which does more than any other to reveal to us an aspect of the life of our Lord on Earth which is closely related to this "aloneness" of His. It is the simple and moving story of the woman who had felt the drain of disease upon her for twelve years, who had, in the rather grim words of S. Mark, *suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse.* The words hide one of the great sorrows of the world, the sorrow of incurable disease, under which we cling tenaciously to life, wretched though that life be, because of the deeply implanted human horror of death, and yet long day in and long day out for the relief that we fear.* But this woman *had heard of JESUS.* She sought Him out. She came at a bad time, however, for His fame had risen enormously of late by reason of His doings in the country about Canaan. His power over demoniac possession

had set the far side of the Lake into a ferment of fear to such an extent that *the whole multitude of the Gadarenes round about* besought Him to depart from them, while on this side, about Capernaum, where they associated His Name with works of mercy and words of tenderest understanding and sympathy, the people, grieved at losing Him even for a little time, *were all waiting for Him*. Thus Jesus had no sooner passed over again by ship than the people gathered thick about Him, pressing to hear and see Him while He was still near the sea, and insisting, with the enthusiasm of a crowd, that the popular favourite should gratify their aroused curiosity and interest. It is easy to picture the welcome of that return. Relatives of the healed persons of the Province, and the healed themselves, would assist to pull up the boat on the white sand and make it fast, eagerly firing questions of this and that at Him as He passed slowly towards the coarse grass of the fore-shore. They and the disciples would be impeded all the time by the crowd who had had no introduction as yet, and who merely stood by and said: "Yes, that's He"; "A Legion of devils He turned out over there"; "Yes, but have you heard that half Gadara is beggared by the loss of its swine?"; "Serve them right, I say"—and the like.

- Suddenly there is a disturbance at the back of the crowd. A richly-dressed man, with a face working in the stress of his emotion, is pushing his way through the people. *Jairus*, the crowd murmurs, *a ruler of the Synagogue*, and falls back for a moment or two, only to close again, and peer blindly, and speculate as to what is going forward, where the little knot surges and eddies round the Prophet. Jairus has caught a glimpse of Him meanwhile, and, forgetful of all dignity, has fallen at His feet with the pitiful hurried story: *My little daughter lieth at the point of death. Come and lay Thy hands on her that she may be healed! I pray Thee! Come and she shall live.* Requests like that were more than Jesus could refuse, and *He went with him.*
- The crowd follows, surging from the wider space where the street to the Lake opened on to the shore; and finds itself bottled up between the high white houses, pressed in a pack at every turn, stumbling over the stones of the road, now shouting noisily at the driver of an ox-cart who could neither go on nor go back, and now abusing some laden slave who presses against the wall to escape the crush. As for Jesus, *the people thronged Him.* I imagine that Jairus kept close to Him, pouring his tale, in the Eastern manner, with enormous detail and profusion of compliment, over and over again into His ear.

The disciples, half amazed at the confusion, but half proud at the notice their Master was attracting, have hard work to keep near at all, elbowing their way along like the brawny peasants most of them were. And then, just then, Jesus stops. He twists round in the pressing crowd, and above the din S. Peter is near enough to catch His voice : *Who touched Me ?*

S. Peter was never one to mince his words. The people about deny that any one touched Him rudely or purposefully, but there seems to be behind the apostle's words something almost of petulancy : " Well, Master, if you will come into a crowd like this, what can you expect ? " *Master, the multitude throng Thee and press Thee, and sayest Thou, Who touched Me ?* But Jesus said : *Somebody hath touched Me ; for I perceive that virtue is gone out of Me. And He looked round to see who had done this thing.*

Our Lord, of course, was right. The poor sick woman coming down to the shore to catch Him, had been caught and overwhelmed in the turmoil of the crowd. Pushed about in her weakness while the noisy rout went by, it seemed to her that she would have no chance of a word with the great Healer at all. It was in a kind of despair that she saw the simple Figure, alone quiet and collected in the confusion, draw near down the way. *If*

I can but touch His garment! she said to herself, and made the supreme effort, as likely as not from the edge of the narrow way where she crouched against the wall. And Jesus responded as immediately as if He and she had been alone by a well in Samaria or among the flowers of that garden where, probably, the tomb in which no man had yet been laid was already a preparing.

What is this, then, but the most striking instance of a certain recollectedness about our Lord which was His at all times and in all places? The little that Christian experience has learned of spiritual things gives us at least two indications of the nature of this. Look at Brother Lawrence in his monastery. It was noticeable about him that whether scouring dishes, or bent over the oven, or even sent about the business of his monastery to negotiate for the purchase of wine, he was as one preoccupied with higher things. He did not do the worse for that. He was as a grave doctor who talks lightly and easily to his patient and arranges this and that detail of everyday life, (as once a great Doctor remembered the simple detail of a child's meal after the most memorable sick-visit upon record), but whose eyes seem to look from a great distance and to speak of secret business within. So Brother Lawrence "practised the presence of God."

THE LONELINESS OF THE CROWD

'Or again, if there is any special phenomenon of spiritual activity, it lies not in anything tangible or visible, but in what is almost the sense of a great silence.' Ultimately it is, of course, a supersensual silence, as indeed it is a supernatural one, but it is one which any man of the least spiritual understanding confesses readily enough. It seems to envelop those who come and go on high matters of God. Not over dramatically, indeed, a keen observer like the late Monsignor Benson, put it again and again into his books—as when Sir John surprised Master Richard Raynal, the Solitary, at prayer, or when the little group of watchers knelt for the passing of Frank Guiseley in the back bedroom of a London slum. •

Combine, then, these two things. The Gospel picture suggests just this of JESUS Christ: that He moved amongst men as One on a great business and as One beset by the atmosphere of another world. That dignity, aloofness, reserve, quiet of His was witnessed again and again. Pilate saw it and cried, *Art Thou a King then?* the rough men-at-arms experienced it more vividly, because at a crisis, and went backwards and fell to the ground. The disciples almost protested against it again and again, as when overwrought S. Thomas could stand His calm assurance no longer and burst out with his,

Lord we know not whither Thou goest; and how can we know the way? The passionate people of Nazareth knew it when something about Him held their murderous hands, and He, *passing through the midst of them, went His way.* It was manifested plain'y enough that night when He slept through the storm, and finally, at the extremity, of His disciples' fear, gave His own peace to the winds and waves. But it was never manifested, as it was that day by the side of the Lake, when a woman in a crowd thrust herself through the atmosphere of His calmness and found Him even then alone for her need.

Pilate had the right instinct when he was moved by our Lord's silence to that question of his, for it is this that makes Jesus so essentially kingly. An earthly king is of the same mould as other men, and yet there is this difference between them, that he is representative of all, is the embodiment of the omnipotent state, is its servant, has a mission that lifts him above all and that he cannot share with any. Consciousness of this makes for that quality which we call kingliness. It has no respect of persons. It makes the king the fount of justice and of mercy. Even in constitutional monarchy enough remains to call out intense devotion and whole-hearted self-sacrifice to such a conception. And with what reality is that

which is but a shadow in all others realized in Him Who is *King of kings and Lord of Lords* ! JESUS was indeed of the same mould as other men in a real sense, and yet He was the Son of Man, the representative of men. He was ~~among~~ us, too, *as One that serveth*. He had a mission to serve, as none other ever did or ever could have. It was a mission given Him not by men but by God, and a truer, kinglier mission just because of that. More—and no earthly parallel carries us here—His consciousness of Heaven and of the reality of Heavenly things, never waning, never wavering, beset Him as with another atmosphere. Walking with men, He walked apart because He walked with God and was God ; and yet not only did He ever welcome men into the seclusion of His majesty and dignity, but He even called them to come : *Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me ; for I am meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.* And again : *Whoso cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out.*

Devotion ought always to come first in our considerations, and devotion plays a real part here. We should try to enthrone in our hearts this so lowly King, and try to picture Him in the royal seclusion of the presence of

God. As we kneel in the silence of our prayers, let the vision of the earthly life of Jesus be very real and true. It is wonderful to see Him up and down the lanes of Galilee or in the noise of the streets of the city, never uncaring but always unstained, never forgetful but always recollected, not always undisturbed—for *JESUS wept*—but always Master of His soul. He is like that little pure white plant of the potteries which possesses a secret essence which clears the least speck off its purity as soon as it settles there. Consider the lilies, He told us, and as you do so, consider the *Lily of the Valley* and the *Rose of Sharon*. Watch while no one ever finds Him unprepared, and listen while every answer exactly meets the case. See how in an instant He is ready for the need that desires satisfaction, though now the people throng Him, or now the rich men make a banquet for Him that they may question Him and glut their curiosity, or now, in the tempest of the extremity of human pain, it seems as if He can hardly still be serene. Yet surely His tone was every whit as tender, His voice as calm, that day He said, *Thou shalt be with Me in Paradise*, as when in the road from the Lake He told the woman that her faith had made her whole and she might go in peace.

So devotion leads on to assurance. No

matter who comes or where or when, Jesus is always alone for those who seek Him. To enter His presence is to be shut into a secret place with Him. *Thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation*, says the old Prophet of the Spirit of Christ in the Church, *A tabernacle that shall not be taken down*. So, too, the golden thread of that wonderful secret runs throughout the Book of Psalms:—

He shall hide me in the secret of His tabernacle; Thou shalt hide them in the Secret of Thy presence from the pride of man; Thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues; Thou art my hiding place; Thou shalt preserve me from trouble; Thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance.

This is the wonderful truth that if only we turn to Jesus in distress He instantly satisfies and covers us with the Shadow of His wings. We never can forget how He cried to Jerusalem that He had been willing all the years to gather her as a hen gathereth her chickens, though she would not. Christian experience in every age has made that true. The mystic, Mother Julian of Norwich, found Him in the shelter of her anchorage. Theresa, or Catherine of Siena, busy, eager women of common sense and practical ability rarely equalled, lived apart with Him. Pascal carried with him to his death—he, the author

of the "Pensées" and the "Provinciales," the master of sharp and lucid sentences, of irony, of brilliance—a little fragment of parchment whereon he had written, in broken words, the story of the wonderful revelation that showed him "not the God of philosophers and scholars, but the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob." Then follows: "My God, wilt Thou leave me? Suffer me not to be separated for ever"; and in something of that union, in the recollection of that moment, he lived and died.

One feels sometimes that the experience of the saints is divorced from life, and although this is the very reverse of the truth, still, more ordinary experience is for some of us even more helpful. What, then, of the young French corporal who led a storming party with heroic courage through a trench blown in the wall of a hotly contested château in Lorraine, and who leaped the mines only to fall on German bayonets. His comrades, who had wondered at the incredible daring of a rather pre-occupied man, gathered round him when the place was won, and a sous-lieutenant, staring at the peaceful face, said, "See, he sleeps." "No," said the wounded man, opening his eyes, "but I am a priest, and I wait for Jesus." Awestruck, the men looked round. By some chance—if it were a chance—a figure in a black cassock was, as

a matter of fact, even then crossing the broken masonry, so close do the French chaplains keep to the firing-line, and in a few minutes the dying man received the Blessed Sacrament. The hideous din and turmoil of war was all about and around; his comrades pressed near to see the end; earth again "thronged" the Master as He came; but He and the soul that needed Him were in a place apart. In a few minutes the wounded man stirred a little on the stones. "Jesus, into Thy hands . . ." they heard him whisper; and he was gone. Small wonder if this war win France back again to the Lord Who has been waiting for her all the time.

But notice this: to break through to that divine still atmosphere that encloses Jesus, needs above all else utter sincerity and abandonment. Herod never pierced to the secret of Jesus, though *he had heard many things* and had been *desirous of a long time to see Him*, and *hoped to have seen some miracle done by Him*; but then the keen eyes of our Lord saw at once to his heart, and knew that he had not suffered many things of many physicians and spent all that he had, and come with fear and trembling if he might so much as touch the hem of His garment. That same garment, too, passed through many villages where, despite the virtue that was in

Him, *He could do no mighty work at all.* That was because of unbelief. Faith, Penitence, Surrender, are necessary to the experiencing of JESUS Christ. It is not wonderful that it should be so, but, as some one has written somewhere, there are those who refuse to conform to the rules of the spiritual world, and who decline to believe, because they cannot attain in their own way, which is as foolish as if a man insisted on shutting his eyes in front of a picture and in feeling it to test its beauty. No, the fact that our Lord came to call only those who are aware that they are not whole, is one of the terrible realities of religion; and it is also one of the tragedies of our age, that that approach which historic Christianity has ever recognized as on a par with that of the woman in the story, (which of all avenues is the swiftest to the Heart of JESUS just because it is the divine plan) is so much neglected among us. Sin has little sting of shame so long as it is merely hidden in the deep of the heart; certainly there is no true penitence so long as there is no desire after the most of grief and reparation that can be made. Here again it is de-humanizing religion to permit men to bury, if possible, the sin on the soul, or to affirm that JESUS is no longer made flesh, and has no accessibility save in the danger and sentimentalism of non-sacramental religion.

Rather the glad gospel of the Sacrament of Penance is that JESUS, one with the great Body of the Church, waits to exercise His healing art as the Divine Physician for any who will open their grief to Him, who will tell all the truth of the years nothing bettered of the medicines the world has to offer, of the longing for peace from the plague. Then the atmosphere of heaven grows almost sensible where one kneels. Then the things that stirring fall away. Then in the divine stillness of the presence of JESUS, a voice that is but lent to Him conveys His message: *thy faith hath saved thee ; go in peace.*

That transaction is for ever veiled and hidden from the world just because it is so essentially a secret matter between JESUS and the soul, in the hidden place that He has prepared. But something of the lesson learned there goes with us as we leave. The recurring visits each bring a deepening of the sense of at-one-ment with JESUS which is itself atonement. As the years go by, it seems less and less that we have to go to seek Him, and more and more that He is *about our path and about our bed*, and that we have only to go there to hear Him, or there to see Him, Who "promised never to leave us, never to leave us alone." *But Thy loving-kindness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, we say, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord*

for ever. We have learnt the lesson of the Lonely Man—that He is lonely because He waits to be gracious. It is His secret; but *the secret of the Lord is among them that fear Him : and He will show them His covenant.*

CHAPTER V

THE LONELINESS OF GLORY

THE reformation of the Prayer Book Kalendar, a small thing though it is in itself, is one of the real wonders of the great religious upheaval of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries! Not only is the principle upon which the revisers went most cheerfully obscure, but that mere printers' errors should have sufficed to set the English Church in bondage to this very day, must surely seem amazing to any one who stops to think of it. Perhaps, however, the Church of England will have strength enough one day to correct faults imposed upon her by unknown Caroline typesetters, and in that hour of release, doubtless the Feast of the Transfiguration will come to share with the "Conversion of S. Paul," and "S. Simon and S. Jude" the beauty of italics. Until then we have to depend largely upon the measure of independence attained by our parish clergyman for the helpfulness of keeping one of the most beautiful and instructive of the days of our Lord.

However that may be, the Transfiguration is a day of many splendours, of so many, indeed, that it would take too long to look at them all. Superficially, however, it was a day of Anticipation, of Manifestation, of Realization, and of Jubilation. Jesus had climbed the mountain (as we would guess) to pray, with the stress and fatigue of His ministry clearly marked on His face, and with another thing plain to be read there now, which had been obscured or unexplained before. There had been all the stress of the sending out of the twelve; of the stir when Herod sought to see Him, and it had been necessary to avoid "that Fox"; of the desert place besieged by the multitude, and of the miracle of the loaves; and lastly of that moment, supreme in importance hitherto, when He had put the disciples to the test, and re-affirmed the early change of Simon's name to that of The Rock. But the latest development of His ministry must have called even more for an ascent to pray. When or how the full knowledge of the end had come to our Lord, we do not know, but for the first time Jesus had said to His disciples: *The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected, and be slain.* For the first time, too, He had looked the far future in the face. He had drawn back the veil and made plain the inner meaning of that following of Him upon

which the apostles had embarked. *If any man will come after Me, He had said, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.*

But He had not stopped at the cross, either in His own case or in that of His disciples. *The Son of Man must be raised the third day,* was paralleled by: *Whosoever shall lose his life shall save it, and shall not taste of death but see the kingdom of God.* What He meant by all that was, in all probability, hidden from His disciples. It is hard sometimes for us to realize how very obscure the sayings of Jesus must have seemed at the time they were first uttered, but if we think how limited had been the experience of His disciples, how impossible the imagination merely of the Resurrection and the Glory of all Saints, and of how little explanation He had vouchsafed to give, we shall not only enter more sympathetically into the mind of the apostles, but we shall come to marvel more and more by what miracle of the Spirit it was that they realized as much as they did. Thus the ascent of that mount with the three chosen friends must have been indelibly fixed in their minds. As they climbed from boulder to boulder—now scattered a little, now drawn together by the unevenness of the way—they would exchange significant glances, sentences of question and possibly of fear,

gestures and indications of the tumult in their hearts. And always, as we picture it, the Master was a little ahead, climbing swiftly and strongly in His strength, but with face "set" already as they noticed again and again later on.

Arrived at the place He had chosen, Jesus fell to prayer, S. Peter and they that were with him, wearied by the labours of that preaching tour, to sleep; already the day of Anticipation was begun. But as Jesus prayed in His loneliness, the wonder that we call the Transfiguration began. Surely it was not so much a new thing, a new glory assumed for a time to teach a lesson and to be withdrawn again, not so much this anyhow as just a manifestation of the reality always there, although the eyes of S. Peter and they that were with him, sleeping or waking, were too heavy to see it at all times. That day the hidden glory of the Son of God burst the wrappings of the flesh as He prayed, the very *fashion of His countenance*, toil-worn and grieved, was *altered*, the very stuff and texture of His peasant clothing made radiantly white and glistening, the very barrenness of that rocky place lit by the glory of those hidden ones never far from any of us although beyond the margin of this world. The weary disciples awoke to see what He had meant when He had spoken but now in

the valley of the *Son of Man in His own glory, and of the holy angels*. That sight anticipated heaven. That sight manifested the holiness of that *Holy Thing* born of the Virgin Mary. That sight realized the prophecy of Him who should be *like a refiner's fire and like fuller's soap*. That sight hid from the future martyrs for a little the terror of the daily cross-bearing, and showed how good it would be ~~always~~ to be there. Surely the light of that glory never wholly faded away, however hard the process of losing life became as they went towards the finding of it.

Then came the strange climax. S. Peter had yet to learn how wholly the will of JESUS, being God, is done in heaven; and small wonder, since the Lord's Prayer being hardly prayed, it was little done on earth. It is a fitting object lesson, however, of what it would be like if we could enter heaven before we had learned the lessons of earth, for that was exactly the experience of these three. So the cloud overshadowed them. Terror fell on them. God's Majesty thundered out of the cloud. And *JESUS was found alone*.

In what, however, lay S. Peter's fault? It was a very interesting one, and one that shows clearly enough how impossible it would be to omit the Transfiguration from any study of the loneliness of JESUS. For S. Peter classed our Lord with Moses and Elias. S. Peter

made plans for God. S. Peter broke into the heavenly converse of the chosen companions of the Christ, and disturbed his Lord at prayer. S. Peter seemed actually to forget that sleep is no preparation for heavenly councils, and even more, he forgot the lesson taught him so recently, and, having never lost his life, hoped to find it already by abiding quietly up there. In a word, he forgot the supremacy and the isolation of the Majesty of JESUS. He forgot another lesson of the Lonely Man.

For us, however, the study of the Transfiguration is full of hope and beauty. First of all it shows us so plainly the great lesson that it is JESUS Who makes heaven. The few short simple words of the evangelists do not hide the fact that all the wonder of the glory on the mountain-top that day radiated, as it were, from the Person of our Lord. It was no exterior light that fell upon Him, but rather the interior Majesty of Him Who is the Light of the World, streamed out for a little while, and transfigured and made plain: That becomes for us a parallel of heaven. There is no one who has not found it hard at times to imagine the beauty of that place or state, whichever it be, and indeed the more we try, the more impossible it all seems. There are some actually foolish enough to reject the whole story because it is clothed

for us in the Apocalypse with figures in white, and harps of gold, incredible though a rejection on that ground is. We do wrong to throw away all the imagery with which the Bible supplies us, for every bit of it points to some aspect of truth, and no aspect of truth is valueless; but when most perplexed by the difficulties of understanding, we have always to fall back on this, that it is JESUS Who gives us heaven and not heaven which gives us JESUS, and that the company of JESUS alone is in itself the glory of God, the perfection of beauty, the consummation of human happiness.

Language like this seems sometimes a little remote from our human experience, but we ought to remember that there is much more there than the conventional words have come to convey. A man in the full tide of his strength, wants, he feels, not the beauty or "the holiness" that the Churches talk about, but energy, zest, opportunities for courage and perseverance, humour, love; and can he find these there? Well, of course, there is a sense in which it is obvious that these words are out of place; for instance, strength implies physical conditions of space and time which are unthinkable of the spirit-world. But the abandonment of the word ought not to be followed, as it is so often, by the abandonment of the idea. It is not a mere

negative that is left; a man's love of the zest of struggle and endurance does not give way merely to singing or golden harps. Far better than that, affirm boldly that strength and courage and humour and love find a place in heaven! Certainly in heaven the things of the spirit which correspond, in real value, to all that is good in these, will find a place there. And they will find a place there, because *there* is just JESUS.

We want to rid our minds—those of us who possess “modern” minds!—of the idea of heaven as a place centring round the throne of God, or at least we ought only to accept and dwell on it when the much truer and more central idea has won its way. The Apostles’ Creed offers us a description of heaven in two words, and those two words are all that can be affirmed about it. “I believe,” we say, “in the life everlasting.” That, then, is heaven. It is life—and it is everlasting. It is life—it is struggle, courage, zest, strength, hope, the joy of attainment, the passion of service, the satisfaction of duty well done. Life is a man’s word. A million men in England have learned to live since last August, learned it in the trenches, learned it, a good many of them, by their deaths. Well, “life” is “heaven.”

But it is life that is everlasting. Everlasting—that is of the nature of God. It is

not life like man's life—petty, sordid, only half realized, never wholly satisfied, transitory, vain. It is God's life, the life of perfection, of perfect struggle, perfect courage, perfect zest, perfect strength, perfect hope, the joy of perfect attainment, the passion of perfect service, the satisfaction of duty perfectly done. No conception of ours, which conveys sinless pleasure to us, will lack its spiritual reality in the life everlasting. And on the sinful pleasures, we shall have learned the joy of perfect hatred and of perfect conquest.

The attainment of these perfections would be more than I could understand, but for one thing. I can see One Who has attained them. As I try to gaze into the character of JESUS Christ, I can see nothing which I do not associate with the noblest and the highest ideas of manhood, nor anything in noblest manhood that is not in Him. He not merely lived; His life was so rich and full and victorious that, struggling for words, I can call it no more than Life. He not merely died; rather His victory was such that I cannot conceive of its interruption, the interruption of life and living such as His. "Everlasting" is the only word I have for it, and as I define JESUS, I define heaven. So I boldly change the two. I do not know what heaven is, but I do know what JESUS is. I can

conceive of no such attainment as that of being worthy to be crowned victor in His company; and as the mount of Transfiguration shows me JESUS making heaven, there seems written about it, in letters of fire, the trumpet-call of His own words: *To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne.*

It is significant that there was a Transfiguration on this earth, because it teaches us there heaven begins. One of the three there that day learned the lesson well. The synoptic Gospels, especially S. Matthew, are full of the Kingdom of God, and by parable and sermon they show us JESUS preaching, and setting His apostles to preach, the coming of the Kingdom. S. John, however, has extraordinarily little to say on that subject. He does, indeed, tell us plainly enough at the outset that, *except a man be born again he cannot so much as see the Kingdom of God*, but with the exception of that incident of Nicodemus (which of course he alone records) there is little further repetition of the phrase. Yet its equivalent is there. Possibly his third chapter is meant as a kind of warning that we shall not see it unless the necessary preparation has been made, but the truth is that another phrase has taken the place of the older one. S. John is full of talk on "life."

The real parallel to the synoptists, *There be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the kingdom of God*, is S. John's, *He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation but is passed from death unto life*. The future tense in S. Luke is the present in S. John. That is the first great change, a change that undoubtedly it took him years to learn, but which he began well on the Mount of Transfiguration. He learned that the presence of JESUS is everlasting life, and that everlasting life is heaven. The satisfaction of that glorious future is not a thing reserved till the weary years have run their course. No; *the kingdom of God is within you*; the triumph of faith in JESUS brings Him to the soul, and His coming is the dawn of life and light and peace. When the cloud had passed *JESUS was found alone*, and yet S. John came to learn that if He was found, nothing of the glory had dimmed, nothing of the heavenly company in which it was so good to be.

JESUS only, then, is the key to the Christian life. The cry of every saint has ever been "I have all if I have Thee." S. Thomas extends this in the "Imitation," the sum of the experience of historic Christianity, when he says—

"Blessed is he that understandeth what it is to love JESUS and to despise himself for JESUS" sake.

THE LONELINESS OF CHRIST

“Thou oughtest to leave thy beloved for the Beloved; for JESUS must be loved alone, above all things.

“Keep close to JESUS both in life and in death, and commit thyself unto His faithfulness, Who, when all fail, can alone help thee.

“If thou seekest JESUS in all things, thou wilt surely find JESUS.

“If thou look to thyself, thou shalt be able of thyself to accomplish nothing of this kind.

“But if thou trust to the Lord, He shall give thee strength, and the world and the flesh shall be made subject to thy command.”

Christianity is no more than a phase of life till this is learnt. Nine out of ten of us make the initial mistake of treating religion as one side of our life; and whether from habit, or from obedience to conventionality, occasional prayer and Sunday church-going become the substitute of Christianity in our lives. It is all for the best that the freedom of modern life, setting men and women loose from the fetters of the conventions, sets them also loose from this. For that kind of religious practice is simply a mirage of the real thing, indeed not even a true mirage, for that at least is a reliable representation of something, whereas this has no correspondence at all with reality. If Christianity

were one among the world's religious systems, such practice might do, for the world's other systems recognize religion as one "side" of the activities of men. But Christianity is not one among such religions. If these are religions, and if this is what religion means, then Christianity is no religion at all; we must abandon the old mistaken, useless word. If the word "religion" belongs to any attitude which can, for example, separate a man's political action or daily life from the creed that he is supposed to confess, then in no sense of the word is Christianity a religion.

Instead it is a life and a life to be lived now. It is whole hearted surrender to "Jesus only," to the Lonely Man. That surrender need not of necessity exclude earthly occupations and pleasures, the enjoyment of art, music, beauty, love; the good in all of these is hidden in Him; but they must come to us in Him and not without Him. Prayer is not an occasional exercise; it is the breathing of the one vivifying atmosphere, the atmosphere of heaven. The Sacraments are not occasional exercises of piety, they are the daily food of the soul. The saints and the Mother of God are not "dead people who can neither see nor hear"; they are the friends manifest plain enough whenever Jesus shows His glory. Heaven is no visionary place and death no "end" of all things; the one is a well-known land and the

other the path, however narrow, to it. Earth is no stronghold of materialism wherein the things of the spirit are out of place ; rather—

“ The angels keep their ancient places,
Turn but a stone and start a wing,
'Tis ye, 'tis your estranged faces
That miss the many-splendour'd thing.”

JESUS Only and alone is Heaven, and JESUS is here with us : that is Christianity. *This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life, and He that hath not the Son of God hath not life. And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols.* “ Men and women of the modern world, keep yourselves lest any counterfeit of reality steal the worship and allegiance of your hearts.”

So the title which we have seen our Lord bear in misunderstanding, in desertion, in pain, glows with a new light. It is like His Name, given because a cross was preparing, but borne up by the angels to the light of the throne of God, at which *every knee shall bow*. Only the words of the inspired S. Paul seem to do any justice to the uniqueness of the wonder and beauty of JESUS, to the sole

glory that is His alone, to our own consummation when we are with Him, and when He, in single Majesty, is all in all. Yet this is the triumphant end of the loneliness of Jesus Christ on earth. *For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to Whom be glory for ever. Amen.*

CHAPTER VI

THE LONELINESS OF GRIEF

OF all the human emotions of *JESUS* Christ, His tears seem most nearly to put His spotless humanity upon our level. There is something in the brief record *JESUS wept* that goes at once to the heart of the race, and the more now that it is the common experience of the greater number of half the civilized world. Surely *JESUS* is not lonely here!

But the moment we review the two occasions on which tears are recorded of our Lord, we become aware that it is not all as simple as it seems, and that that divine Figure Who moves in such isolation among those whose experiences He came to share, is not in any less isolation here. S. Luke gives us the most vivid picture of the one; S. John exclusively records the other, perhaps because he saw more of its importance in the working out of our Lord's life, or, perhaps, because he of all the disciples was most likely to sympathize with it. The first picture is

utterly arresting the moment it is cast in our imagination. There is the white road across the valley and up the hill, which dips first among the trees, and then climbs to the grass and flowers of the heights around Jerusalem, not so far from the "fields" where once the shepherds kept their flocks by night. The road is full of moving groups of people, but just at the summit the crowd is thickest. It is a scene of indescribable enthusiasm. The sight of the white and gold of the Holy City, glittering so close at hand in the vivid sunlight, ordinarily moved the pilgrims to a demonstration of pride and delight; but to-day the enthusiasm of the disciples, who seem to think that the end of toil is in sight, has infected the people with a new spirit, and the throng is tossing palm branches, spreading clothes in the way, welcoming a King *meek and riding upon an ass*. The children shrill *Hosanna* with their elders; and if one group stands aside from the popular enthusiasm, their emotion is not grief but anger—in this case a very different thing. And there, alone in the joyous crowd, isolated from the sunshine and beauty, He only seeing the true meaning of those white roofs below, Jesus wept. There was no doubt about His loneliness that day. .

At first sight the Lazarus story presents a far different spectacle. Few eyes were dry

this second time that Jesus wept. The details all point to His intimate share in the grief of the others. First He had shown that lonely bravery of His in abiding *two days still in the same place where He was*, and He had come to the sisters at Bethany when the two days were past, *to comfort them concerning their brother*. He knows, too, why He has come, for He had told the disciples, *I go that I may awake (Lazarus) out of sleep*. The grave, then, had no terror for Him. As He talked with Martha and later with Mary, just outside the town, He showed that serene confidence that marked Him out amongst men; but when He had asked them where they had laid the body, and the little procession had been formed to go to the grave, the tears of the Son of God are no longer withstrained, and *Jesus wept*. But there is indeed a uniqueness, an isolation, about this grief. Even the Jewish friends of the house perceived it, wondering why He wept since surely *the Man which opened the eyes of the blind* was as good as responsible for what had been. He was; that was one reason why He wept.

The "Reason Why" of those tears of Jesus is a study in itself, and if there is a sad heart anywhere, there is comfort here for it. First, no doubt, JESUS did weep because He was responsible for most of the grief that day. Conceive the gladness of

that little household if only the Master had come at once, and, as with Simon's wife's mother, had laid His hands on Lazarus that the fever might leave him! There is a world of tender reproach in Mary's *Lord, if Thou hadst been here my brother had not died.* (It is the old story, incidentally, of the loneliness of misunderstanding once again.) Yet it had all been deliberately done, as deliberately as when God, without Whom no sparrow falls to the ground, quietly withdraws His Hand. One of the most moving of the stories in "The Light Invisible" shows us a steep descent to a bridge, a little boy at play, a runaway horse, and then, like a flash, the vision of a Face entirely kind and of a Hand utterly tender, which, nevertheless, thrusts the child beneath the wheels. How many, maybe, have been thrust these last few months into the path of the shell! We shrink from believing, sometimes, that God's Hand is over the torpedo and the mine; more, that God and not the Kaiser let loose the red ruin of war. Did He? Well, that is a big matter into which this is not the place to go, but we can be sure of one thing if He did—that He did it with tears—of a necessity, lonely tears. This is a new vision of God. Those who see it learn not to say, *Lord, if Thou hadst been here my brother had not died.* Instead they seem to

see their Lord asking through tears: *Is it well with the child?* and they make reply, *It is well.*

Probe a little deeper. JESUS wept not merely because of His sorrow at having caused the death, the necessary, advantageous death of the brother, but He wept quite truly because He bears our sorrows. We are distinctly told that the tears came when He saw Mary and the Jews in such bitter grief. The sorrow of that dear home beat^{ed} in on His human soul and He knew just all that it meant to see the grave close over love. But surely it was not only out of sympathy with the little group on the road outside the village of Bethany, that He wept; rather, the flood of our common human grief carried all away before it, and that day JESUS shed tears with every mourner who has ever made that sorrowful pilgrimage to where dust is returned to dust as it was and it is left only to scatter a few flowers and to pray. Our dead are borne to the grave down a path marked by JESUS' tears, yes, whether amid the thunder of guns, or in the swell of the sea, or through the crowded half-forgotten memorials of a great city cemetery. Even more, surely it is comfort to think that where the soul has gone out in isolation, and we have been grieved because we never knew, or at least we could not be by to

help, even there Jesus at least has wept. I remember when first I thought of that. It was the bleakest of winter days in a big northern city, and the coldest of graveyards, little sheltered on the slope of a hill. Work-house officials carried the rough black coffin from the chapel, where it had had to wait for a big affair in which it shared like a beggar at a feast. Only two mourners were visible, a woman who called herself wife and was ~~not~~ (and her face showed it), and a little boy who cried as much because the cold wind pierced his borrowed coat as because his father was dead. But, as I read the prayers above the grave, it dawned on me that Jesus had wept there, that maybe the tears He had shed here were richer than those He had shed yonder, not the least because we buried a prodigal who had returned. So I read on, with a strange exultation that made it a little hard to speak, a little hard to see, but an exultation which is the prerogative of the Christian Faith and born of Jesus' tears.

But even again—and this is plain enough, when He wept over Jerusalem—our Lord had tears because the whole horror of the curse and the punishment was visible to Him. That fair city, how white and gold; and yet never gathered beneath His Wings. White? it was red with blood; gold? it was black with sin; and even as He looked, *the french was cast*

about her and not one stone stood upon another. So, too, at the grave of Lazarus, it was not merely that Lazarus was dead. It was all that death meant that moved our Lord. Death is the very fruit of sin, as sin in its essential nature is the very opposite of life. Its trail is all over the world because of our loss of that everlasting life which is God's, and therefore will be ours. Death, of course, is not extinction, though we think and act so often as if it were; rather it is the ~~severing~~ of soul and body, which is why the paradox is true that in Jesus on the cross God died. That division seems to be necessary because we are compacted of weakness not subject to the law of God, which is the contagion, at least, of sin. Man is, "of his own nature, inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the spirit," and that lusting flesh is purged through the divine alchemy of corruption, while the spirit is purged in the place that God has prepared for it. That great Provençal entomologist, Jules Henri Fabre, has shown us how wonderfully certain of the common beetles, whose very food is putrescence and ordure and whose very materials are of corruption and excrescence, fashion not merely the food of their grubs and of themselves, but even their very burrows out of the refuse of things. "They elaborate the waste matter of death," he says, "in

order to restore it to life." Wholly of the vile comes forth the iridescent being, the glowing body, of the perfect insect. Surely that is in its way a parable of death. But just as surely as it is the wonder of God that this should be, so too it is a punishment that it should be necessary. Not otherwise than by grief and pain and isolation and separation and corruption, can we come forth into life. The inevitable law is written across the world. The weak and defenceless, the seeming innocent and pure, the lover and the loved, all alike must pass through the valley of the shadow of death. Not merely a Judas but a Lazarus; not merely the nameless outcast but the very Christ, must tread that way. *It is appointed unto men once to die. Man that is born of a woman . . . cometh up and is cut down like a flower. Jesus wept.*

Here then are the essential elements of the loneliness of the grief of Jesus. They are additional, I think, to the more commonplace sorrow that was there in its way, the grief of losing one's friends which is the real grief of death. Although Jesus knew that Lazarus would shortly live again in the flesh, still the poignancy of separation was there and that same feeling that we know as we stand by the grave, the feeling that not merely is this one dead, but that one by one our friends will all slip away, and we too at the end, in our

solitude. It is the shadow of the Great Divider that we fear. And that day it lay on our Lord; it deepened the shadow that was on Him, because He alone knew the real horror of death, because He shared so uniquely the grief of all about Him and the grief of the world as a whole, because it was His to have caused it as none other could cause, deepened it until the evangelist records again and again that He *groaned in spirit* and finally found relief in human tears. Surely He was afflicted *more than any man, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief*, lonely in the excess of His pain.

It would be well if this War taught us all to learn of the Master how to weep. It is a lesson we all need to learn. Perhaps no experience in the ministry is more significant than the one repeated so frequently when a priest is called to comfort mourners and to try to bind up the broken-hearted. Talking recently the other day, an old servant of God, well known as a father among his people, gave two instances directly contrary the one to the other, of the effect of bereavement, and we all of us know their like well enough. Now the stroke of death seems to be the very "Hand of God outstretched caressingly," since there follow from it love and faith and peace; but, on the contrary, how often all three wither at the touch of death!

Even more commonly neither the one nor the other takes place, and that is almost worse than the last. No priest who has acted chaplain to a cemetery for any length of time does not feel, if he be a priest at all, the grimness of that procession that seems to pass unmoved through the chapel from day to day. The moment's tears, half hysterical, often selfish, possibly even hypocritical—this is no way to weep. Despairing tears, broken-hearted tears, these are not much better either. Let us ask JESUS to teach us the secret of true tears.

At the outset He teaches us that our tears should be shed much more out of sympathy for others than for ourselves, or, at least, that tears for others should mingle with our own. What a bond of sympathy would be knit about the world if we remembered this! what advance made in that inner kingdom of *peace on earth and good will towards men* that can grow even amid the thunder of guns and do so much towards lessening their power! Recently a German paper published the following, which many must have read:—

“An exalted person has visited the tombs of our soldiers fallen in the months of August and September on the banks of the Oise, and found among many others two large mounds with wreaths of flowers laid on them. The first bore the inscription: ‘Offered by the

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women of France to the German soldiers, our brothers in JESUS CHRIST.' A second inscription read: 'For the German soldiers, our brothers in JESUS, dead far from their country, wept by their families. We pray for them.' German mothers will read, certainly not without emotion, how France treats her sons fallen in the great battle."

It was in the spirit of JESUS that the Catholic mourners of France, as they wept for their own dead, made inscriptions such as these, and it is that lesson that is written over the scene at the graveside of Lazarus. Such wide sympathy deepens and lessens grief at one and the same time. It deepens its healing powers, it lessens its sting; as it ennobles those who weep, so it reaches far out towards that great end when love shall be supreme in the Kingdom of God.

Here let us stay a moment to think one further thought. The tears of mourners should be shed for the dead, not that they are dead merely, but for the sin that has stained all life, and theirs with it. The deep note of penitence, and of vicarious penitence, is one that belongs essentially to the mourning of historic Christianity, and one that is too often sadly missing where, for whatever reason, that Christianity is weak. JESUS teaches us not to omit it. We pray with tears, not indeed for the salvation of the soul

that has passed—that is settled one way or the other; but we ought to pray with tears that the so little spiritual progress of the earthly life that is over may be made up quickly beyond, and that the stain and loss of sin, which rests in some measure on nearly every soul, may be continuously and increasingly blotted out by the action of the Precious Blood. “Grant them, O Lord, eternal rest, and let light perpetual shine upon them.” “Grant them the pardon”—the full measure of pardoning restoration—“that they have always desired.”

JESUS teaches us, too, how to weep trustfully. In the whole range of the Life of our Lord there is hardly anything to match the pathos of that scene by the grave. There stood the Son of Man, lifting eyes full of tears to the blue vault above Him, and praying *Father, I thank Thee*. No wonder that many of the Jews which came with Mary and had seen the things which JESUS did, believed on Him. Few could have looked into that tear-stained trusting face of His and gone away unconvinced that here was the Son of God. That day, of course, He was trusting for the immediate quickening of the body and for the immediate return of the soul, trusting, too, that He had been right and not wrong in waiting forty-eight hours, and in doing all that He had done. But we, also, have the

lesson to learn. After all Jesus must have stood by many graves and not *cried with a loud voice* to the dead to come forth, but He never stood, we may be sure, the less trusting for that. Since, in all His loneliness, He was never *alone* from the presence of the Father and never distrustful of His ultimate over-ruling, so, in the moments of crisis, He could fall back on that strength. It is that simple lesson which we have to learn again and again. Whatever stroke falls from the Hand of the Father, that *Father, I thank Thee* can convert it into blessing both for us and for those we love. He has His own purpose to work out. The life is not cut short; life indeed never can be that. It has gone out and on, fuller, freer, abler. We should put upon the grave, never the broken pillar, but always the spreading cross, symbol of the meeting that has been, symbol of the stretching vista of the years of enrichment in the Kingdom of the Christ.

Yet once more, it was courageously that Jesus wept. S. John makes the earthly ministry of the Lord turn on that scene in Bethany. It was *from that day forth* that the Pharisees took counsel together for to put Jesus to death. The thing, they thought, must go no further, for *all men will believe on Him*, and henceforth there was a price on His head. Jesus knew that, and He knew,

moreover, that there was one in His very company who would take it though it were only thirty pieces of silver. That day's work closed His earthly activities in a great measure. Henceforth He *walked no more openly among the Jews*, but *went thence into a country near to the wilderness*, convenient, doubtless, for lonely prayer. But the thought of that had made no difference to His action, had not checked His sympathetic tears. He knew perfectly well that one has to press through tears to the goal. He was courageous while He wept.

The shadow of a terrible mourning rests on Europe, but Jesus is an example in it. Never were deaths so necessary as now, when all men feel that right and justice have to be vindicated. Half central Europe will be a graveyard before all is done, and we have all to watch our best and bravest step down into it. What then? Thank God there are endless things far worse than death; thank God death is little sorrow if men bravely die. Ten thousand who, for whatever reason, know little enough and practise less, of the revealed religion, are stepping into the presence of God with a better record than if war had never been. Besides, Christendom itself is purged by blood. Men will look each other in the face, bolder and freer when the price has been paid, than if it had never been.

asked. Right—the right of nations and of men—what is it when the business of the world to get and gain presses harshly on us? but weigh it in the balances against the lives of lads who die to serve, and it is a rich and noble thing. Courage then, *ye that weep now*. Tears are worth while. *Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted.*

c Just this remains, as we turn away from Bethany. Our Blessed Lord calls us to company with Him in His temptations, ~~to~~ bear a part in His labours, to find fellowship in His cross, and all these we strive to do. They carry with them the blessedness of fellowship, which is the joy of them that fear Him, but some belong to one and some to another, to all, perhaps, in part, to few in whole. But there is one companionship which is open to us all. It is when the Lonely Man calls us to share His tears.

CHAPTER VII

THE LONELINESS OF THE PASSION

IN two great scenes the loneliness of JESUS reaches its climax, two, because one concerns more especially His loneliness among men while the other, possibly the most profound of all the traditional sayings and doings of our Lord, gives us a glimpse into the mystery of the union of the human with the divine, and is wholly Godward in its attitude. The first of these is the agony in the garden of Gethsemane, and with it we are concerned here. That wonderful night, indeed, of the Last Supper, the High Priestly Prayer, the Betrayal, the Arrest, and, as the morning dawns, the Judgment, might seem to have little room for so wholly a human aspect of our Lord's life, and yet that of which the evangelists give us from time to time some glimpse, is here seen distinctly portrayed.

JESUS seems always to have longed for human companionship. He early established that little band of servants who became friends (*for the servant knoweth not what his master* .

death, but ye know). Out of them He chose three to share the intimacy of the mount of Transfiguration, sealing their lips afterwards for a time; to witness the tenderness of that sick-visit to the house of Jairus; and to accompany Him into the more hidden of the secret places of the Garden of Olives. Even out of the three He chose the one who seemed especially "the beloved apostle," to lean upon His breast, when, *having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end*. And even this is not all. Bethany is enough to show how the Sacred Heart of our Saviour went out towards sympathy and love how He, Who could not share with the foxes their holes nor with the birds of the air their nests, loved to linger, when He could, in the warmth of a home. But such indications are in a sense rare. At least, as we watch our Lord, we feel more the isolation of His position among men, and that He is so much the Helper and Comforter that there is little room for Him to be helped and comforted. And yet Gethsemane shows us exactly that He craved for this. It shows us Jesus longing after human companionship, human sympathy, even human help, and it shows us Jesus denied them all and going, the Lonely Man, His lonely way into the valley of the shadow of death.

S. Matthew, with one touch from S. Mark,

draws the completed picture of that hour of peculiar need. Jesus has looked—how wistfully!—at His disciples, and the pathos of His *All ye shall be offended because of Me this night* had aroused the hot, eager, dear passion of S. Peter's *Yet will not I*. They had all caught that eagerness from him. Loyal enthusiasm had never run so high, as when the little band left the city for the last time. One can almost see them in the narrow streets between the high white houses, lit by the silver radiance of the fateful moon coming to its full, as they press about Him and whisper eagerly to one another in the manner of aroused and excited men. But when they are at the place, Jesus separates His three. Surely it would be hardly wrong to imagine that He still hoped that these three at least might prove stronger away from the half-hysterical eagerness of the rest. Anyway He said to the remainder, *Sit ye here while I go and pray yonder*, and passed on. Then the Son of Mary began to be *sorrowful and very heavy*; questionings, fears, distrusts, pressed in upon Him; He must watch, surely because He, too, *was entering into temptation*; but He longs not to have to watch alone. *Watch with Me*, says the sorrowful Master. Only a stone's cast away, He fails to prayer; and then, almost as if He too found it not always the easiest thing to be comforted by prayer,

He comes back to the sharers of His vigil for the companionship He needs. Weary, oppressed, sad, He stands and watches them—sleep. *What, Peter, could ye not watch with Me one hour? . . .*

Back once more 'unter the olives, the whisper of the sublime prayer is heard again. Perhaps He had learned from the sleeping disciples to change the *let this cup pass* of His first prayer to the *if it may, not of* His second, to lean, that is, still *harder* on the will of the Father; but the Son of Man finds even that couch hard now. It is as if He cannot rest. Who can say what He wanted to get from His disciples of comfort and of help, but at least He is back again seeking it. Yet He comes this second time again in vain. S. Peter, who would die with Him, cannot watch with Him, and as for the two who thought they would be able to drink of His cup—ah, well, *they knew not what they asked*. Even then, when He awakens them so tenderly once more, with heavy eyes, as S. Mark tells us, *they wist not what to answer Him*, and without the comfort of a human word, the Lonely Man goes back again to pray. Goes back this time to *the sweat, as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground*; goes back to pray yet more earnestly; goes back to the victory supreme because so lonely, and to the gathering of that sure

courage which carried His weary soul without a falter to the Cross, without a stumble to the crown.

• Yet, as we turn the pages of the record, or watch the unfolding of the drama scene by scene, we can never forget that Jesus sought for human sympathy. It is the remembrance of this that does more than anything else to preserve the human pathos of the Passion. If it were not for that seeking, we might be almost tempted to forget that He was man. Who stood so heroic and unbending before the Sanhedrim, Who looked kingly enough crowned with thorns or nailed to the Cross to win even there the testimony of the governor, the homage of the centurion and—best of all—the allegiance of the thief. If it were not for this, we might perhaps banish the tears which make it so hard to see them carry the white, drained body to the tomb, knowing as we do what waits it there. But as they set the guard and seal the stone, as the terrified apostles gather in the upper room, as Mary's heart, stored with the secrets of the thirty years, breaks with its sorrow, this seems to be the crushing, pitiful remembrance, that Jesus, in the hour of His bitterest need, *looked for some to have pity and found no man, neither found He any to comfort Him. Instead, He found them sleeping. All the disciples forsook Him and fled. Peter began to*

curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man.

Now the Incarnation is robbed of its truth and loses its value if it has not eternal echoes in the life of God and men. Just as the Christian religion would be no better than the Jewish if it merely looked back to some distant manifestation, no matter whether of the Tabernacle in the Wilderness or of the Cradle in Bethlehem, or if it relied for revelation only upon some written record, no matter whether of the Tables of Stone or of the Treatises of S. Luke, so God would be no more made manifest to Christians than to Jews if there were not some correspondence between the experience of the disciples with the Jesus of the Gospels, and the experience of Christians with the Christ of the Church. That there is such correspondence is the great message of historic Christianity. Chrysostom tells us, in the very words, to look upon the altar for that same Body which shepherds worshipped in the cradle of Bethlehem; Ignatius of Antioch, while yet the apostolic memory glowed amongst men, that there lay the Flesh which was formed in the womb of Mary. So, too, a golden chain of words, which *cannot pass away*, though the heaven and earth be rolled up like a scroll, links the message of the priest to the penitent with that of Jesus to the man sick of the palsy.

The Son of Man was sent, in the Spirit, having power on earth to forgive sins; and when the Son of Man sent, in the same Spirit, His disciples as the Father hath sent Me, He indicated of all their powers this in particular: *Whosoever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven them.* It is the same, too, with His teaching. *Vox Corporis, vox Capitis. He that heareth you, heareth Me. Go ye, teach . . .* *Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.*

So Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, and, being the same, He still has need of human help and sympathy. He still leaves His disciples, saying *Watch with Me;* and He still comes again and finds them sleeping, because, as it chances, man, like his Master, is very much the same to-day as yesterday. Hard as it may be to understand, it is always a weakness and a danger to say, "You cannot press the details," or, "You can speak only in a mystical sense." Mystical soon comes to mean unreal, and if you do not press the details, the picture is soon so blurred that it moves no one, inspires no one, shames no one. Hard and pitiless forms of Christianity have strewn Christendom with wreckage from excuses such as these. Ultimately men come to forget what it means that *the Word was made Flesh*, and that *He abideth faithful*; and to forget that, is to forget.

the very essence of the Faith that turned the world upside down.

Let us just see, very simply, how the great sorrow of that night under the olives can be realized again and again. The truth is that the thirst of Jesus Christ for the souls of men survived the cross and the tomb, and that He Who still lives in His Body the Church is always consumed by that same desire. That Body of His is, on the one hand, inspired by His Spirit, and on the other conditioned by our humanity. It has simply been God's plan that it should be so. It has been His plan that, long as He may to hold the water of life to parched lips in England, in Africa, in China, He has chosen to do so only when human endeavour is pressed into His service, and human hands and feet and lips lent to Him. On the other hand, it has been His plan to clothe such endeavour *with power from on high*, and to make it possible that the coming of such human messengers should be no less than the coming of the Christ. S. Peter was given the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and it was indeed S. Peter who opened Heaven to the lame man at the Beautiful Gate, and who shut it to Simon Magus. And yet it was not, for instance, S. Peter's shadow merely that healed the sick, for the shadow of S. Peter was the shadow of his Lord. *Be it known unto you all,*

and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, Whom ye crucified, Whom God raised from the dead, even by Him, doth this man stand here before you whole.

Here, then, are the two sides. The Bishop of London spoke recently of "The Christ with the bound hands," and with bound hands does Jesus of Nazareth walk still the streets of half the world. No little crippled child is born of sin into a world of woe in Hoxton, but Jesus drinks again of a cup that may not pass away—though in the end the will of the Father, that *not one of these little ones should perish*, shall be done, and that just because He drinks the cup. No maimed and half-blind soul is made to stumble somewhere off Piccadilly, but a Judas has betrayed his Lord again for a few pieces of silver. No boastful but frightened disciple sits by a fire in Mayfair when Jesus is called in question, and denies Him at the test, but once again that Master is wounded more deeply than by Roman or by Jew, *in the house of His friends*. And even more, nowhere is deliberate sin planned and plotted and performed, but some one has ridden by the Cross on Calvary and stabbed Jesus mockingly to the heart.

JESUS, then, turns ever to His disciples with that request of His that they should *watch*, and one of the world's greatest sorrows is that often, bitterly often, He goes away, the

Lonely Man. I think He steps with His request into the life of every one most vividly once at least. You can, if you like, call it vocation, and say that His coming is the dawn of a sense of duty, of a call to serve. Quite certainly the watching that He asks may be of infinite variety—of a gunner by his gun, of a woman by her husband, of a priest where the Sacraments are set, of a religious in the hidden cell that is closer to Gethsemane than any other spot the world can show. It is always His watch that He asks us to share, a watch that He will keep in His stricken Heart no matter what we do; but you may be sure, as He comes, that Jesus longs still for human help just there. Yet the eyes of His disciples are more often than not heavy still. Then He goes lonely away.

If nothing else happens, I think at least we ought to put it into our religious life to grieve with Jesus for this, time and again, with the very real intention of sharing His sorrows and of comforting Him. Some may think such devotion too full of passion to suit English religion, but that is a very great mistake. England had passion and tenderness enough in her religious life once, and please God she shall have it again. What we fear sometimes is the simple humanity of it all. But that is surely wrong. Christianity is human precisely because it is the

religion of the God made Man, and there is a true value and reality in our sorrow for the sorrows of the Sacred Heart. Lent is the best of all times for this, Good Friday, naturally, the best of all days. We should aim at offering to JESUS our own devotion and love; then our penitence that, in the test of life, it has so often proved a weak and faithless thing; then our resolve that by His grace we will not fail Him again. But do not then go away. Consider those bound Hands in ten thousand cities and villages of the world at home and abroad, and sorrow for them. Consider that thirst for love, that has gall offered it in the very city in which you pray, and comfort Him. . . .

“ A broken heart, a fount of tears,
Ask, and they will not be denied;
Lord JESUS, may we love and weep
Since Thou for us art crucified.”

• But Gethsemane teaches us two great lessons which may help us, humbling though both of them are. There is no doubt, in the first place, that the disciples failed our Lord that day; but there is no doubt, also, that, despite their failure, they did not cease to have a part to play in the coming of His Kingdom. The three who slept there that night were to lead the forlorn hope of the Christian religion in Rome, centre of imperial worldliness; in Ephesus, a centre of the false

and sensual faith of the world; in Jerusalem, the centre of externalism, and the failing cradle of the best that had been. Rome was to give strength, Ephesus love, Jerusalem the sense of worship, to the new religion, and the three sleepers were to be the instruments for bringing such treasures to it.

It is just the message of the Old Testament retold in the New, less harshly, more beautifully, but retold. David has taught the world contrition, who failed so badly on the roof of his palace in the sun; Jacob, the mean and grasping Jew, was yet builded into the ladder by which Jesus came into the world in process of time; Jonah, who fled before his vocation, has yet turned back to God more than dwelt in Nineveh; yes, and many prophets too. In the same way men fail to-day. How many priests would have gone crying through the wilderness of Africa and the East, if they had not been tempted by the love of ease, or of learning, or of a woman, to sit still! Yet these do draw men to God where they be. How many men and women have heard the Saviour call for watching where watching will mean almost the sweat of blood—the anger of parents, the loss of name, the shame of the world's scorn—and their places are empty in the sisterhood or the religious order to-day! Yet they are on God's side in the conflict, where they be.

How many are bidden to sympathy with labour who prefer the home to the club or the curb; to this or that employment when, with less trouble and no shame, they can take an easier one; to some task which is done a little less than best for the want of an hour's more watching! Yet all these are servants somewhere still. They have come back by the road of S. Peter's tears—of penitence and prayer. There is no other road, and though it is a hard one, it leadeth into life.

It may be that some of us are among these; indeed, there is little doubt that at some time or another, more or less, we have all been found asleep because our eyes were heavy. That God can use less than the perfect instrument is a word of cheer; but it is of greater cheer still that, after all, *He* did not fail that day, that the cup has been drained to the bottom, and that we can come in again, as it were, and perhaps not fail again. That is a lesson some men never learn, because it is so full of humiliation. It does not do not to learn it, because one may fail too often, or the Master call His servants for the settling of accounts before we have got to work at all; but once learnt there is great cheer in it. God has His purpose for the world, and He is working His purpose out as year succeeds to year.

That night in Gethsemane, it was the draining of a cup that needed to be drained, and One alone could drain it, though He asked for help the while. He was denied the help, but the cup was drained. So the great Heart of God, wounded and torn however much it be, beats still beneath the breast-plate upon which are written the names of His people, and ultimately the armies of the redeemed shall cross Jordan to the Promised Land. How many days of battle and distress lie ahead we do not know. Only we know the warfare still wages, that it is victorious, and that we may yet rise, though we have been wounded, and take our place in the ranks. We may even win there a place not far from the one we ought to have filled, and even for us there is still laid up a crown that fadeth not away.

Only it is sad that Jesus has not many friends, and of these, few who have not slept an hour now and again. He seems to be always a stone's throw away—the Lonely Man.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LONELINESS OF THE CROSS

No study of the loneliness of Jesus Christ would be, in any sense at all, complete, unless it took account of that supreme mystery of loneliness which is our first thought, in all probability, the moment the subject is mentioned. But here, where the wisest and the holiest have laid down their pens, and yet here, face to face with a mystery that no one lover of the Christ does not wish to unravel, how shall we proceed? We are brought right up against the supreme marvel of the Atonement, and the Cross of Christ has an appeal to the heart of the sinner which triumphs over the difficulty of its understanding, and which, in one sense, disarms inquiry on the part of any one who has found it to be true. The Cross calls for living, not for explaining. It is God's great appeal to our sin-stricken need of a Saviour, and it remains a challenge to the wisdom and pride of the world. It is as if Almighty God flung His gage down upon the world, for never

did His power make greater demonstration of Himself, or His wisdom more greatly defy the inquiry of men. In some African village the Cross proves itself *the power of God unto salvation* over century-long inherited weakness, incredible temptation, Satanic interference, and all for one who cannot write his name nor read a book; in some University study, the Cross proves itself inscrutable to the best that the student can bring to bear upon it, and remains, for him, the stumbling-block, the scandal, of S. Paul. Ah, well, it is the old jealousy of God: men insist on being saved by the intellect; God that He shall save first and instruct afterwards, "*Credo ut intellegam*," cried the old scholar-saint: I believe that I may know; nor is the modern theologian * very different in principle who says: "Doubtless I might be happier, could I feel myself a man of the new dogmatic, not 'essentially a sinner.' But I cannot. I have this burden, like Christian in the story, and I cannot roll it off except at the foot of the Cross. . . . What must I do to be saved? Alas! I know that I can do nothing. . . ."

'Nothing in my hand I bring.
Simply to Thy Cross I cling.'"

Our difficulties about Calvary all arise from the simple fact that that Mount is where God

* Dr. Figgis.

meets with men—here, that is, the inscrutability of the Infinite meets the inquiry of the merely finite. The saving power of the Cross results from the fact that God and man meet there, but that implies God's side and man's side and the clash of our understanding with His. The range of man's wisdom is a long one. We have been given intellect, the power of synthesis and of inquiry, unique among created things, and yet, range far as it will, there is a limit placed to our power. Somewhere, sooner or later, we find the borderland upon which no finite thing may go, and across which begins the untrodden factness of the infinite understanding of God. That borderland draws us all like a magnet. There is a strange joy in straining to pass its invisible barrier, and no one who thinks at all does not know it. Only to stand on a hill-top and allow one's mind to reach out and up towards space is to reach that mysterious region very soon. My mind insists that the wild flight of the miles through space must find an end somewhere; and yet even in the moment of that insistence it denies that there can be an end, for there must be something upon the other side! So, under the clouds and the stars, the puny civil war goes on, and a man, with his understanding, tries to encompass God. And this is exactly the difficulty, ultimately, of all our

theological problems. Free-will—how I know I have it! Determinism—how certainly I insist that it must belong to God! Sin—how little can I deny its shame and power! Omnipotence—how imperatively do I ascribe it to God! In each case a battle joins. In each case our minds are on the borderland. Maybe when this mortal puts on immortality, this finite will range further into the infinite—maybe! In that day we shall see further into the Cross, too; well, the further we see; certainly the more we shall adore.

Our great difficulty in regard to the Cross is easily expressed. It is so hard to see why anything at all was required for God to be able to forgive us, so still more hard to see how the death of the Man Christ JESUS can affect my sinful soul. That death will, indeed, of course, inspire me to sorrow and to effort, but there are ten thousand deeds recorded in the world's history which inspire me to that. Besides, that does not touch sin. If I am weak and dying with disease, something may inspire me to bear it, to make some great effort despite it, but no amount of inspiration will give me back my health. What divine alchemy then was JESUS about on the Cross? What terrible restraint—if it was so—held back the infinite love of God? Why was the Precious Blood necessary for one or the other?

And why did that consummation have to be which Jesus expressed when He cried, *Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani*?

We have seen the pathos, the beauty, the wonder, the inspiration of the loneliness of Jesus; we are to see now its necessity. We must not expect to understand all about it—to grasp it altogether with our intellects and to “comprehend.” But we must try to “apprehend”—to lay the hands of faith and love upon it—ere we pass from our study of the Lonely Man.

Let us reflect for a moment, first of all, upon what sin essentially is. Our difficulty with regard to sin is precisely this, that as sinners we can never fully appreciate what sin is, because contact with it has blinded our eyes. Our spiritual nerves have been dulled to a sense of its horror, so that whereas we *say* what it is, we do not *feel* about it as God feels. Those great Saints who have come very near to God give us something of a clue, as when S. Augustine, for example, looks back over his life and is horror-struck by sins of childhood that almost draw from us a smile. S. Augustine has not been made childish or hysterical by holiness; nothing is further from that so great a statesman and so profound a thinker; rather his spiritual understanding has been quickened to a sensitiveness which is wholly foreign to us. We can see the

same thing in the New Testament and S. Paul, —that vivid language *Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin*; that beating and scourging of the apostle's body to keep it under control; that cry of a great soul *Oh wretched man that I am!* Even more, in the necessity of a divine interposition for the birth of the Saviour and His Mother, we can glimpse for a moment the essential antipathy of God to sin. God would have no contact at all with sin—God in the overwhelming majesty of that light *which no man can approach unto*; sin in the spreading contagion and death of deliberate rebellion against Him. The thing is as impossible as is the contact of white-hot steel and drops of water, without the annihilation of the nature of one or the other.

So sin, in which we are involved, presents this terrible problem of irreconcilability in its primary and simplest aspect. Wonderfully and interestingly, it does not much matter how we come to be involved in it; and, even more startlingly, if a man should decline to admit it because he does not understand it, or, by habitual pacification of the spirit, fail to feel any need of delivery from it, then there is no need for such an one to go any further, because, Christ is no concern of his. *They that are whole have no need of a physician. I came not to call the righteous.* There again

is a deep in the mystery of Christ. Such words do not, of necessity, condemn; but they pass over. What the future may be of the soul that is not aware of sin, is hidden from us; what is revealed is the Cross for those who are *weary and heavy laden* and need rest for their souls. There are enough of such to employ the energies of religion, and Christ would have died if there had been but one. Yet as we pass to this problem of irreconcilability—we, who stagger and groan beneath the weight of sin, it is well to remember that Christ came to men who did not feel it, precisely in order that they might. He saw loss ahead for which so great a risk as His rejection by one and another was well worth while. We have to leave it at that. *If I had not come, they had not had sin, but now they have no cloak for their sin. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both Me and My Father.*

It is our Lord's next words to this in S. John which give the key to His Passion and His great Dereliction. *They hated Me without a cause.* As we look at that wonderful life, its complete absence of offence is its most marked characteristic. Jesus went about doing good. Each step of His earthly road added to the number of those who owed Him life, to the list of those who had every reason to

love Him and none whatever to hate; and yet each step brought Him nearer to an inevitable conclusion at the Cross. He raised no standard like Judas Maccabæus, of political revolt; He was no abolitionist, like S. Paul, of the law of Moses;* He was no "Puritan," to rouse the despairing hatred of the fallen and poor. Yet Pilate condemned Him, the Pharisees accused Him, and the rabble shouted against Him. Never was such tenderness, such humility, such courage, such love—never such a display of all that calls out the devotion of men, yet never, in a true sense, was the whole established order of things so aroused as when Jesus came to Golgotha. The very thieves who were crucified with Him reviled Him; the very disciples denied or fled.

And when you ask why, the reason is so plain. Everything that Jesus did was the very antithesis of the ordinary. His whole life was one great accusation, although He never accused. It is visible at every turn, with good and bad, with high and low. Why did the disciples, the brave S. Peter, flee? Because their methods were all wrong, and

* I mean that, to the end, our Lord worshipped in the Temple, paid tithes, and insisted on obedience to Levitical and Deuteronomic rules. He never, *e.g.*, denounced Circumcision or the like. The hands of the Keepers of the Law were held for this very thing, that He never broke its essential mandates.

they were dazed and condemned the moment the right method was thrust upon them. It was sin that had always met injustice with the sword, that had set generations of men on the wrong path towards the abolition of evil. St. Peter's sword taken from his hand, and the sword of Christ's surrender thrust into it instead, he flies. The human and the ordinary breaks down, condemned, and just for this reason, because it was wrong. So with Herod; what turned him into a beast, lustful of cruelty against an innocent, and even reconciled him to Pilate? Simply that silent Jesus, Whose very silence—wordlessness before guilt so unutterable—stabbed its accusation to his very heart, wounded him as it had wounded Pilate, and gave them the bond of a common hate. Thus came Jesus to Calvary, thrust there, inevitably, by friend and foe alike, because the world into which He had come had only two alternatives in the face of a thing so foreign to its own nature. It had to turn itself upside down and crown Him King with unlimited sway, or it had to cast Him out. It had to slay itself, or Him; it is the divine paradox that in slaying Him it went the speediest way to slaying itself.

Yet Jesus was Man Who had taken our nature upon Him, and stirred in a human womb, and lain feeble in a mother's arms; One Who had learned obedience, too, out of

the lesson books which we blotch and tear though they contain all that is necessary for the lesson. But we are *disobedient children*, He, *the Son of the Highest*, and this is the secret of the Atonement: that Jesus was the first and the last of the sons of men to tread our earth unstained by the touch of disobedience or rebellion which is sin; that God saw every sword uplifted time and again against His Majesty by the sons of men, buried for once in a human heart; and that every pain endured through countless years by Himself as the outraged Father of a prodigal world, was shared by the Man Christ Jesus. Once that was consummated, once the last stab had gone home and the tortured heart remained faithful, a new thing was done under the sun. A link was forged between earth and heaven. God would look again upon the earth and see one spot where it was good.

So the eyes of our wondering devotion turn to the climax of Calvary to see that consummation reached. The dread process by which the earth rejected Jesus slowly works itself out step by step and line by line. He is spai upon and crowned with the thorns of the curse, that earth may hurt Him with her own shame. He is declared innocent but too good to live, and her own justice is flung into the glare of truth to show its rottenness.

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He is scourged with the whip of the slave that she may demean, if she can, the one kingly soul that there has ever been. He is hustled and jostled out into the street, crushed to her stones, flung from her gates, for He has no part in her evil life. All hatreds unite that they may together hate Him—the hatred of the artisan, the soldier, the priest, the outcast, the king and the governor. He is lifted upon the Cross that earth may proclaim that she knows Him no more, and the very skies hide their face. Oh, white and ruddy Lord against that black sky, was ever man lonely as Thou?

But He is earth—she cannot escape Him! He is Man; He is of the soil, too. He has slept with the foxes, and knelt upon the flowers, and eaten bread and meat, and tasted wine. There never was man like Jesus, in Whose veins the nature of humanity ran undiminished by the nature of the devil (which is sin). Willingly, gladly, freely, for a lifetime, He has carried our sorrows, and made friends with publicans and sinners. He is the lover of the harlot, the companion of the drunkard, the fit company for thieves. He has never, even, tried to hide it as we do. He has never pulled His skirt aside in the road and said that He at least has no share in that. Rather He has even said that humanity bred that, and that He shares

humanity, and therefore shares its shame. For that reason He has laid hands on the leper; Who is He that He should not? He is even about to die, because death is the common lot of man and He will share that as He shared scalding tears, and gnawing hunger, and the weariness of utter exhaustion. Never, then, since the earth rolled through space, did so truly a Son of Man stand out from her as here, and it was His "generous love" that He should be taken as 'of her' and as part of her to the end—that "generous love"

". . . that He who smote
In Man for man the foe,
The double agony in Man
For man should undergo."

So, *being made sin for us*, He shared in that hiding of the Father's Face which is the essential horror of sin. That day, as other days, God's countenance was turned away from the earth because of its iniquity, and it will not be turned back till Calvary is over. *My God, My God*, cries JESUS, *why hast Thou forsaken Me?* I believe that in a great sense He was voicing the experience of His life, an experience borne hitherto by the Man of Sorrows in the silence of His Heart. No doubt it was intensified on Calvary, but the Lonely Man, Who is rejected by earth because He is sinless, is rejected

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by God because He is sin. Oh, unutterable paradox of love! Oh, triumph of the wonder of His loneliness! Jesus renounces His inheritance because He wills to inherit, and He is renounced by His inheritance because He is heir. At that ninth hour Jesus our Lord is unutterably alone in the wide range of all that is.

At that ninth hour, too, the battle of His loneliness is finally and for ever won. The last drop of the cup is drained then; the last pang suffered, and the rejection of Him, the Sinless One, by sin, complete. He has reached the end of the weary road, and taken the final step, though it cost in anticipation the sweat as of blood, and in realization the parting asunder of body and soul. Yet all that way He had never once looked back. God has watched Man live and die, as man, obedient in all. Humanity, though all unknown, has One at last of her sons, Who has won in His own right the heritage of creation—that perfect intercourse of God and man that was lost as early as the dream of Eden and has never been won back before. God, in His Holiness and Justice and Purity, has found One upon Whom He can bend eyes of delight, among the sons of men. The separation of sin is annulled in Jesus Christ. The tragic, age-long wounding of God is paralleled in the wounding of the Son of

Man; God and Man have common ground in Jesus. At-one-ment is implicitly attained. The veil of the temple, hiding the Mercy Seat, rends from top to bottom. The victory of loneliness is complete, and Jesus cries, as He cried when a little Jewish boy in the cradle, *Father, into Thy Hands I commend My Spirit.*

• We have already thought how impossible it is to resolve, ultimately, the mystery of our redemption into a series of simple propositions, but the key to very much is now in our hands. God did not cease to love through the weary centuries, any more than the sun ceases to shine behind the clouds, but there was a veil between us and Him. It was a veil composed of man's will, of man's will first sinful, and then, at the best, so weakened by sin that that will could never will with un sinful strength. God, humanly speaking, could only have torn down that veil as the result of the destruction of will, that is of man as man; but on Calvary the veil was torn, from our side, by the perfect sinless Human Will, the Will of Jesus Christ. Sin was punished, too, in the death of Jesus, because sin is its own punishment, inflicts its own pain, and in Jesus it was sin that inflicted every pain because of sin. Somehow, there, the Sacrifice that was to be sufficient atonement for the sin of the whole

world was laid on the altar for ever, and if that delivered the Past, the Future was guaranteed too, because in JESUS the bridge was laid across the gulf that separates earth and heaven.

One thought, then, as we close. Our forgiveness is made possible by that Sacrifice, but attained by a union with the Sacrificed. There has to be acceptance of the one, acquirement of the other. Forgiveness had to be won, and we have to be made forgivable—two things knit eternally in one. The great Sacrament of the Altar is the eternal realization of the two, for there forgiveness is made possible by the offering of *the Lamb of God, Who taketh away the sins of the world*, and there, by the eating of the Flesh, and the drinking of the Blood, which is *true meat and true drink for eternal life*, union with the Saviour is consummated, and by that union we are saved. Only One—unique and lonely—has ever passed the swords which guard the Gate of Paradise and entered Heaven as a conqueror by right, and only he can follow who is *accepted in the Beloved One*. Here is the reconciliation of the old fight between Faith and Works, though God knows there has been no fight where the Sacrament of the Altar has been undisputed. "Faith" it is which carries us to the altar in the person of our representative

the human priest, and faith which breaks the bread and lifts the Lamb of God before the eyes of the Father; and "Works" it is which draws our faltering footsteps to the altar rail to consume the Heavenly Bread, and sends them out renewed with the strength of the altar fire. And the One great Agent, Himself the Victim and Himself the Priest, Who has done all and Who is in all and over all, to Whom is the eternal glory and dominion, is the Lonely Man.

THE END

